FATHERMEN
PREDICAMENTS IN FATHERHOOD, MASCULINITY AND
THE KINSHIP LIFECOURSE

Adom Philogene Heron

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews

2017

Full metadata for this item is available in
St Andrews Research Repository
at:
http://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/

Please use this identifier to cite or link to this item:
http://hdl.handle.net/10023/10999

This item is protected by original copyright

This item is licensed under a
Creative Commons Licence
Fathermen

Predicaments in Fatherhood, Masculinity and the Kinship Lifecourse. Dominica, West Indies

By Adom Philogene Heron

This thesis is submitted towards the degree of PhD at the University of St Andrews [22.12.16]
Declaration

1. Candidate’s declarations:

1. Adorn Philogene Heron hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80,000 words in length, has been written by me, and that it is the record of work carried out by me, or principally by myself in collaboration with others as acknowledged, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

2. Supervisor’s declaration:

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of PhD in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

Date 21/12/16 signature of supervisor __________________________

3. Permission for publication: (to be signed by both candidate and supervisor)

In submitting this thesis to the University of St Andrews I understand that I am giving permission for it to be made available for use in accordance with the regulations of the University Library for the time being in force, subject to any copyright vested in the work not being affected thereby. I also understand that the title and the abstract will be published, and that a copy of the work may be made and supplied to any bona fide library or research worker, that my thesis will be electronically accessible for personal or research use unless exempt by award of an embargo as requested below, and that the library has the right to migrate my thesis into new electronic forms as required to ensure continued access to the thesis. I have obtained any third-party copyright permissions that may be required in order to allow such access and migration, or have requested the appropriate embargo below.

The following is an agreed request by candidate and supervisor regarding the publication of this thesis:

PRINTED COPY

No embargo on print copy

Supporting statement for printed embargo request if greater than 2 years:

ELECTRONIC COPY

No embargo on electronic copy

Supporting statement for electronic embargo request if greater than 2 years:

ABSTRACT AND TITLE EMBARGOES

An embargo on the full text copy of your thesis in the electronic and printed formats will be granted automatically in the first instance. This embargo includes the abstract and title except that the title will be used in the graduation booklet.

If you have selected an embargo option indicate below if you wish to allow the thesis abstract and/or title to be published. If you do not complete the section below the title and abstract will remain embargoed along with the text of the thesis.

a) I agree to the title and abstract being published YES
b) I require an embargo on abstract NO
c) I require an embargo on title NO

Date 21/12/16, signature of candidate __________________________ signature of supervisor 21/12/16 __________________________

Where part of a thesis is to be embargoed, please specify the part and the reason - N/A
University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee

24 October 2012
Adom Philogene-Heron
Department of Social Anthropology

Dear Adom

Thank you for submitting your ethical application, which was considered at the Social Anthropology Ethics Committee meeting on 24 October 2012 when the following documents were reviewed:

1. Ethical Application Form
2. Risk Assessment Forms

The Social Anthropology Ethics Committee has been delegated to act on behalf of the University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee (UTREC) and has granted this application ethical approval. The particulars relating to the approved project are as follows -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approval Code:</th>
<th>SA9225</th>
<th>Approved on:</th>
<th>24/10/12</th>
<th>Approval Expiry:</th>
<th>25/10/15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project Title:</td>
<td>'Fathermen', 'Fatherwork' and the idea of the Father in Dominica</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher(s):</td>
<td>Adom Philogene-Heron</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor(s):</td>
<td>Dr Huon Wardle, Dr Paloma Gay y Blasco</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Approval is awarded for three years. Projects which have not commenced within two years of approval must be re-submitted for review by your School Ethics Committee. If you are unable to complete your research within the 3 three year approval period, you are required to write to your School Ethics Committee Convener to request a discretionary extension of no greater than 6 months or to re-apply if directed to do so, and you should inform your School Ethics Committee when your project reaches completion.

If you make any changes to the project outlined in your approved ethical application form, you should inform your supervisor and seek advice on the ethical implications of those changes from the School Ethics Convener who may advise you to complete and submit an ethical amendment form for review.

Any adverse incident which occurs during the course of conducting your research must be reported immediately to the School Ethics Committee who will advise you on the appropriate action to be taken.

Approval is given on the understanding that you conduct your research as outlined in your application and in compliance with UTREC Guidelines and Policies (http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/utrec/guidelinespolicies/). You are also advised to ensure that you procure and handle your research data within the provisions of the Data Provision Act 1998 and in accordance with any conditions of funding incumbent upon you.

Yours sincerely

Convener of the School Ethics Committee

Social Anthropology Ethics Committee
Department of Social Anthropology, University of St Andrews, 71 North Street, St Andrews, Fife, KY16 9AL,
Tel: (01334) 462977 Email: socanthadmin@st-andrews.ac.uk

The University of St Andrews is a charity registered in Scotland: No SC013532
In Memory of Ancestors

\|

Alascar Philogene

Granny Althea

Mona George Dill

and

Peter Mendes Philogene

/\

Rest in Eternal Power
Acknowledgements

To be welcomed, fed, told stories, offered adventures and laughter, invited home as family. These are some of the many invaluable gifts my Dominican friends and family shared with me. To you all – names far too numerous to mention - I am eternally grateful.

Apwe Bondye Se La Te ['after god the soil'].

I give thanks firstly to The Most High, for guiding me through this journey over land, sea, ocean and page.

To my parents, Roslyn Philogene and Alex Heron – ever dependable, ever loving, ever present. To Sinead, Lucas and Kim, the same is true. To Annabel – this thesis could not have been completed without your encouragement, kindness, patience and love.

Special thanks to my family from Colihaut, to Castle Comfort, to Wotton Waven.: Auntie Joan for your generous radiant heart, your ‘old time story’, your strengthening ‘provisions’ and fish, and for your wisdom filled proverbs.

Christabel for your support, your concern, your inspired mind and your storytelling.

Sarah for your generosity, your ever-witty insight and your baking, oh your baking! And Omar my Cuban brother, thanks for being an inspirational model of fathering.

To Grace and Greg, for showing me the island and having my back.

To Edward for laughter and adventures. To Augustus for your stories of hard work and spearfishing; for quiet moments spent in your serene yard.

Sinead, Myrah, Schellie, Samara, Daniela and Isabelle – an intelligent and beautiful future for our clan.

To Auntie Vernie who embraced me as her child and made trips to Colihaut full of joy and local treats. To Caryll, her daughter, for nice conversation, laughter and good food.

To Bwiggas for your hospitality and one bad soukouyan story when Domilec failed.
To Cousin Dora, for conversation on your veranda, for stories of my grandfather and warm presence.

To Auntie Alethea for our adventures, your smiles, your joy of life and kind soul. To Shern, ‘Uncle Spice’, Liselle, Q and William. And of course, Ma Hosay. My peoples!

To Sherwin my bro and partner-self, dwivaying from Possi to the Valley to Carnival.

In Loubiere:

To Scratchie and Cyrilla, who welcomed me into their home, told me many stories, shared kindness and good times – made me appreciate the simple things and what’s important in life.

To Julie and Alby, Star, Scientist, Rhoda, Bob, Ratty, Carol, Margery, Joel, Merlene, Mr Polly, Mr Billy, Bryon, Brutus, Brandel, Simba, Zidane, Kroks, Nas, Darren, Lampard, Shane, Nickleson, Naji, the twins and Priscilla, Sixty, Shane, Al James, Mark Bill, Benny, and Stephan – Gens Loubye – my kin!

To Sir Greggs, Alisha, Miss Mavis, Miss Josey and all the Baha'i Youth – the world is your island!

Dr Lennox Honychurch, Honourable Gloria Augustus, Dr Alwin Bully, Annie St Luce, Mr Hensel Valerie, Inspectors Mathews and Weeks, and Mrs Weeks – thanks for your inspired reflections; thanks too for the fraternity and support of CariMAN.

Thanks to coach Don Leogal, Maggie and Faustin, and everyone at Harlem/Sessame/Newtown Football academy. The hallowed Newtown Mecca is every present in my soul and my boots.

To Saryta, for kindness, support and smiles.

To my Godsons Rano and Milan – bright stars of this world. To Granny Althea, Grandma Alascar, Mendes and Mrs Mona – stars in the hereafter.

Thank you to my supervisors Huon Wardle and Paloma Gay y Blasco for your careful readings and constructive comments on numerous drafts.

Thanks to Stella Phipps for the beautiful cover art.

And thank you finally to the ESRC for so generously funding this project.
Abstract

*Fathermen* is an ethnographic journey in the kinship lives of men on the island of Dominica, West Indies. It traces the various complexities, conundra and contradictions Dominican men encounter and create as they navigate relational life trajectories. These are termed *kinship predicaments*: moments in kin-lives that trouble hegemonic concepts of fatherhood and masculine personhood; that spark ambivalence between dominant ideals and lived experiences; that provoke quarrels between mothers’ expectations and fathers’ practices; and expose incongruities between established norms and emerging forms. Seeking to transcend the historical and contemporary circumscriptions that stereotype Caribbean fathers as absent studs or patriarchal authoritarians, this enquiry asks how Dominican men chart their own paths of paternal becoming. Developing an intuitive participatory methodology, referred to as the *ethnography of relation*, *Fathermen* commutes into the kin-worlds of Caribbean men, seeking to understand fatherhood through deep dialogue as it is built from the ground up. Organising its chapters around local idioms through which Dominicans frame kinship, *Fathermen* features discussions on: the romantic and conjugal tensions that precede/inform parenting; the ‘mystic’ bodily affects that draw men into reproduction; the vexed norm of paternal provision; Caribbean fathers’ emergent nurturant practices; the classed politics of paternal recognition; and, finally, men’s ambivalent intergenerational experiences of becoming grandfathers. *Fathermen* argues that it often takes a lifetime to realise fatherhood, with many Dominican men unable to resolve its many paradoxes within their mortal spans. Whilst it contends that men are ‘tied’ tighter into kin-life as they grow along their paternal journeys, ambivalences persist. Yet still, amidst angst and complexity, *Fathermen* is nonetheless an ethnography of love, dedication, familial vitality, creativity and humour.
Contents

Declaration................................................................................................................................................................... ii
Ethical Approval.......................................................................................................................................................... iii
Acknowledgements................................................................................................................................................... v
Abstract....................................................................................................................................................................... vii
Contents .................................................................................................................................................................... viii
Table of Figures.......................................................................................................................................................... 1
Prologue. Waati’kubuli in The World..................................................................................................................... 1
Introduction............................................................................................................................................................... 10
Chapter 1. Emplacement and the Ethnography of Relation........................................................................ 23
Chapter 2. The Gwopwel as Conjugal Crisis and Patriarchal Paradox...................................................... 55
Chapter 3. When ‘Blood Speaks’ ......................................................................................................................... 90
Chapter 4. By the Hand of the Father ............................................................................................................. 126
Chapter 5. Being Seen to Care.......................................................................................................................... 154
Chapter 6. Performing and Precluding Respectability................................................................................ 185
Chapter 7. Becoming Papa ................................................................................................................................ 205
Conclusion .............................................................................................................................................................. 223
Bibliography............................................................................................................................................................ 234
Appendix ................................................................................................................................................................. 247
Table of Figures

Figure 1 Dominica, southern aerial view ............................................................................................................. 3
Figure 2 The Lesser Antilles..................................................................................................................................... 8
Figure 3 Map of Dominica....................................................................................................................................... 9
Figure 4 ‘Arrivants’.................................................................................................................................................. 24
Figure 5 Mendes’ departure for Dominica, 1985 ............................................................................................ 26
Figure 6 The “White House” .................................................................................................................................. 32
Figure 7 A training session, Loubiere savannah .............................................................................................. 43
Figure 8 View of ‘The Shack’ from Scratchie and Angeline’s house.......................................................... 48
Figure 9 Yard Work: Scratchie roasting an agouti whilst Angeline and their daughter watch on.... 50
Figure 10 The Gwopwel ......................................................................................................................................... 55
Figure 11 The bayside bar where the man sat mute the previous night ................................................ 56
Figure 12 Working scheme of Dominican conjugal idioms........................................................................ 66
Figure 13 Bus drivers ‘pull up’ chatting on the bus stop, Roseau............................................................. 70
Figure 14 ‘Tabanka’ (2000) calypso by Denyse Plummer.............................................................................. 72
Figure 15 “So no woman can’t cut style on me”, Facebook examples..................................................... 76
Figure 16 Newspaper cutting of ‘classifieds’ advert for potions................................................................... 81
Figure 17 Periodicities of Paternal Naming ...................................................................................................... 91
Figure 18 Elima’s Shop ....................................................................................................................................... 102
Figure 19 Cleve and his ‘named’ twin daughters......................................................................................... 104
Figure 20 Jingle Jam video skit .......................................................................................................................... 109
Figure 21 Vanley outside WTK .......................................................................................................................... 113
Figure 22 Hands .................................................................................................................................................... 126
Figure 23 ‘Fathering beyond reach’. Michelangelo’s, *The Hand of The Father*. ........................................ 152
Figure 24 Being seen to care............................................................................................................................. 154
Figure 25 ‘Here... when he’s needed’ ................................................................................................................... 168
Figure 26 Okim and his Daughter. Loubiere, Dominica, 2014................................................................. 176
Figure 27 ‘Babydoll Skerrit’ and Reveller, Roseau, 2014.............................................................................. 178
Figure 28 Father and Son, Roseau, 2014 ........................................................................................................... 178
Figure 29 Man and his Daughters, Roseau, 2014 ........................................................................................ 179
Figure 30 Ouncie and his Son, Colihaut Carnival, 2014................................................................................. 179
Figure 31 ‘Nothing better than hanging out with your kids. They are my heart beat’, Scratchie 181
Figure 32 ‘Paternal Profiling’ .................................................................................................................................................. 181
Figure 33 ‘Easy Sunday with the Princess’ ................................................................................................................. 183
Figure 34 Scratchie Peeling Fig .................................................................................................................................................. 185
Figure 35 Scratchie loading a barge at work. ....................................................................................................................... 189
Figure 36 Scratchie and Cyrilla’s marriage anniversary E-Card .......................................................................................... 190
Figure 37 Independence 2013 .................................................................................................................................................. 191
Figure 38 Scratchie on DBS Radio show ‘Straight Talk’. ....................................................................................................... 192
Figure 39 Scratchie and Mahalia during a trip to Guadeloupe.......................................................................................... 204
Figure 40 Becoming Papa ...................................................................................................................................................... 205
Figure 41 Gus’s Sunday nap with his granddaughter ....................................................................................................... 220
Figure 42 Mendes’ Funeral booklet ......................................................................................................................................... 224
Figure 43 ‘Plan Your Family’ (Caribbean Family Planning Affiliation [CFPA], date unknown) ........................................................ 247
Figure 44 “And please help us find our father” (CFPA, date unknown) ................................................................................. 248
Figure 45 ‘Where’s the father? Have a heart’ (CFPA, date unknown) ...................................................................................... 249
Figure 46 ‘Fathers also plan their families’ (CFPA, date unknown) ...................................................................................... 250
Figure 47 ‘A child – A life: A father’s responsibility’ (CFPA, date unknown) ......................................................................... 251
Prologue. Waiti’kubuli in The World

Waiti’kubuli (’Tall is her body’) is how early Amerindian inhabitants knew her.\footnote{I follow Waiti’kubuli (’tall is her body’) and \textit{la Dominik}, the Kalinago and \textit{Kweyol} names for the island in my use of feminine pronouns. In this I also wish to descriptively animate the island to the extent that Dominica’s topography and vegetation constitute a forceful agent in the county’s social history (Honychurch 1995: xi).}

This island, this steep ‘tropical iceberg of vegetation’, she juts high from the sea, a mountainous memorial to the sheer rage of her volcanic beginning.

She arrests and captivates visitant imaginations with her rugged verdant mass.

\footnote{Trouillot 1988: 28}
Situated southwards of present-day Gwad’loup and north of Mat’nik she has known many faces throughout her human histories. Amerindian, Hispanic, French, West African, English, Creole.

Her violent geological genesis echoed into her social birth.

Tainos, Arawaks and Kalinagos (‘Caribs’) descended the Orinoco river (of present Venezuela) and moved up Antillean chain raiding, warring and mixing as they went\(^3\). This composite Amerindian corpus first made home, and later, found refuge in her rainforested hills. Hills cloaked by vegetation; shielded from the terror of Spanish marauders, busy exterminating their island neighbours.

That serene Sabbath of 1493 when Columbus’ caravel entered her calm Leeward waters and christened her “Dominica” (Domingo; Sunday), who was to know the irony such a name would foretell.

For although she would be named after an imperial day of rest\(^4\), the colonisation of her wild landscape and similarly denoted inhabitants (‘the warring Caribs’) proved hard work.

Wait’kubuli, rained arrows on attempts at Spanish settlement. Her Amerindians mounted a fierce defence and offered only occasional trade with Spanish caravels.

French missionary fathers, then yeomen negotiated European stay with Kalinago hosts. Their heritable presence lingers in the light eyes and hues of some village enclaves, in surnames and the francophone patwa.

In time France became de facto father (1635).

Small estates of coffee and cane cropped up, and the importation of captive bodies - torn and transported from Africa, through the abyss\(^5\) to America – were forced to make them grow. The rudimentary plantation machine\(^6\) cranked into gear.

Wars raged. Kalinago and Negro, were trapped between the devil and the deep blue sea as Britain and France made her an imperial pawn in their bloody pre-Napoleonic chess match.

\(^3\)Back and forth between Taino, Arawak, Carib; Baker 1994
\(^4\)An institution inaugurated by Breton missionary-settlers from the 17th century onwards
\(^5\)Glissant 1997
\(^6\)Benitez-Rojo 1992
And when Britannia won-out (in 1805) after years of to and fro, she was torn between langs and tongues; patwa and English; Les Antilles and The West Indies; British, French, Amerindian, Black, and all that had grown in-between.

She was either ‘nobody or a nation’.

The neonate society was cleaved along pigmentocratic axes that distinguished white administrator, planter and yeoman from mulatre, shabeh/ine, ‘Carib’; free black, and the enslaved – colour-coded categories on a descending spectrum of value.

And woven through this complex tapestry were kinship relations - public and concealed, ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, ‘legitimate’ and ‘illegitimate’ - between plantation patriarchs and their wives, enslaved concubines and children. A politics of familial inequality, recognition and denial was in motion.

Appetites for sugar, coffee, cocoa and citrus grew throughout the rapidly industrialising Northern Atlantic (in the 18th and 19th centuries). More captives were imported and profiteering planters pressed their chattel for increasing yields from recalcitrant mountainous estates. But many high ridges and deep valleys were simply too steep for cultivation.

Instead, her interior became populated by canopy covered rebels – negres mawons – fleeing to an (e)state of freedom, warring British regiments and enchanting her dense forests with the legendary echoes of their names: Pharcelle, Soleil, Jean Zombie and the like.

Dominica developed into a ‘patchwork of enclaves’; topographically dismembered between Caribbean and Atlantic, interior and coast; and between Roseau, commercial and administrative capital to the south and Portsmouth, economic hub of the north – with few connecting roads.

---

7Walcott 1977, Scooner Flight
8 Shabeh/Shabine and mulatre are two patwa terms connoting persons of mixed black-white descent and ‘high’ complexion. The important nuance however is that the Shabeh (Breton, lit. trans: hybrid between goat and sheep) is of historical / ancestral admixture and often poorer, whilst the mulatre is the direct offspring of white and black parents – and thus a more immediate inheritor of some Eurocentric/white privilege.
9 Green 1999
10 Local English term for plantation
11Honychurch 1995: 116
12 Trouillot 1988
Over the years many economic storms visited her shores. Dependent on distant markets her diminutive mono-crop estates and family farms were vulnerable to external vagaries. Coffee, cocoa, sugar, citrus, and bananas each brought boom then bust. Bananas - decimated by WTO rulings in 1996 - were once known as ‘green gold’. Their ‘hands’ (as a bunch is known locally) provided farmers a cash income to feed families. And in times of woe, *fig* (green banana) offered the island subsistence.

‘Dominica nice man, things jus a lickle haard in de country for de time’: a common contemporary adage of *jens Domnik* (Dominican folk), told to the sojourning visitor who marvels at her natural beauty.

Her people keep gardens on family lands perched in her heights, securing subsistence through persistent financial storms.

*Awpè bonjay sè la tè.*

‘After god the land’, her national motto reads.

Now, the last of the banana and citrus estates have been sold. Her people shift between subsistence ‘gardens’, fishing, a trade, an entrepreneurial venture, employment in town, or overseas emigration – between that ever changing something else that might come along\(^{13}\), promising gainful income.

Today, though sensitive to the echoes of servitude in service, many – government at the helm - look to (eco)tourism as panacea for ‘The Nature Isle’.

Her break from Britain came in 1978, yet a turbulent era of dreadlocked rebels in the hills and attempted coups preceded it. And following the break was David - a tempest so strong that every family has a tale of the devastation he wrought.

Many fled, journeying ‘to make better’; as they had to Panama and Curacao in the early 20th century, Britain towards its middle, Canada and the USA thereafter; and across the Antilles as they had all along. Their kinship ties stretched across ocean and sea. Some withered, some cleaved, some vibrant and enduring.

\(^{13}\) Trouillot 1988
'The world is an island', I recall the speaker at a Roseau Baha’i meeting once stating. An affirmation of global unity. Dominicans proliferate beyond their shores, carrying their small island to the world. And equally, they return - bringing the world to their ti pay (little country). My Auntie Joan says that ‘it takes many people to make a world’. Hers is an appeal to respect difference. Dominica is the world of which she speaks; a social world in the world. Populated by just 71,000 residents, with more overseas who ‘go and come’, Wai’tikubuli is the rugged, insular, polyrhythmic14 world into which this ethnography enters.

---

14 Benitez-Rojo 1992 – by ‘polyrhythmic’ Rojo is alluding to diverse modes of being and expression that inhabit the Caribbean cosmos.
Figure 2 The Lesser Antilles (islands south and east of Puerto Rico)
Figure 3 Map of Dominica (circled, key research/familial sites)
Introduction

I accept this archipelago of the Americas. I say to the ancestors who sold me, and to the ancestors who bought me, I have no father, I want no such father, although I understand you black ghost, white ghost, when you both whisper “history”.

Derek Walcott 1974: 27

The Caribbean man builds his own fatherhood, his own future.

Valérie Loichot 2000: 101

In a sense, the story of the Caribbean father is a vexed and complicated tale of origins. Between African and European ancestries15, black and white archetypes, enslaved and master, the tale concerns a past characterised by violence, accommodation, creativity and erasure – each brought to bear on contemporary Caribbean images of the father. ‘The figure of the father has long troubled the Caribbean’s imagination’, writes literary theorist Jennifer Rahim (2011: 3), evoking the enduring paternal echoes of a painful past. This thesis examines the kinship journeys of Dominican men who inherit this fraught history; who navigate the many contemporary predicaments of conjugal and parental life, attempting to build fatherhood16 despite its complicated backdrop.

I introduce this enquiry by interrogating the prevailing version of this troubled history, questioning its bearing on contemporary kinship lives. I term this version the myth of the dead father (hereafter, ‘the myth’), the prevailing story Caribbean societies (and their observers) tell themselves about what fathering means to the region. Like Burton (1993) of Martinique, Vergès (1999) of La Reunion, Benitez-Rojo (1992: 265-75) of Cuba and Loichot (2000) of the Antilles in general, I employ psychoanalytic elements to understand the significance of kinship in a post-plantation society. Rather than venturing into oedipal symbolism, the myth locates the plantation

15 Asiatic and indigenous elements of Caribbean society were excluded from prevailing narratives.
16 Fatherhood is my own analytic here. As a local idiom fathers exist, but fatherhood as an encompassing feature of male identity is a much more recent concept. Fatherhood is distinguished locally from paternity. The former entails economic responsibilities, contact and everyday ‘checking’ of a child; the latter involves merely being a ‘sperm donor’, a ‘father in name’. See p. 127, 166 for elaboration.
as the primal scene where a black father is slain by a patriarchal white father, and thus the Caribbean, a black space, is symbolically dispossessed of fatherhood. I present this myth to summon the central problematique of this thesis: to ask how, in a place where fatherhood is so vexed by the dual archetype of white patriarch and dispossessed black stud, do fathers/men practically and symbolically figure kinship. Thereafter, I outline how I conducted this enquiry, before I introduce its central arguments and map its textual course.

The myth of the dead father

There is a very commonly held theory that one of the reasons there is such a preponderance of single mothers is because of slavery, an institution which greatly disrupted the black family. There is an idea that if you take away a man’s responsibility for his children, which is what happened in slavery when the man was replaced by the master as head of the family, it does something to the psyche of the man of African origin.

Caryl Phillips (Davison 1994:25)

According to many Caribbeanist and Caribbean common sense accounts, the forced birth of Afro-American/black life – via kidnap and transatlantic trafficking - signalled the symbolic death of the Afro-American/black father. Unquestionably, slavery constituted a form of ‘social death’ (Patterson 1982), a violent system of material and symbolic dispossession that denied the full humanity of enslaved people. However, I wish to challenge the notions that enslavement (a) killed ‘the black family’ and (b) did so through its decapitation, removing the patriarchal black father. Across contexts from Jamaica to Barbados historians concluded that under slavery ‘the family was unthinkable to the vast majority of the population’ (Patterson 1967: 9, 167; Greenfield 1966: 45). And equally, since The Plantation reduced black males to chatteled studs - spatially separating them from procreative kin (Goveia 1965; Olwig 1985), undermining conjugal unions (Frazier 1939: 24; 1957: 12) and concentrating paternal power in white overseers and masters (Patterson 1982: 65; Simey 1946:48-49) – this led scholars to conclude that the paternal function of black males

17 Calling upon the psychoanalytic concept of ‘the dead father’ (see Kalinich and Taylor 2009) I refer not simply to the literal historic deaths of many fathers, but the loss of the ‘cultural father’, the paternal function as symbol of law, order, custom and authority (Taylor 2009: 15) amongst Afro-Americans.
had been eliminated. Thus, the Afro-American father – Walcott’s black ghost – had, according to such accounts, figuratively drowned in the abyss of ‘the middle passage’; only to be replaced in the New World by the patriarchal authority of the slave master – Walcott’s white ghost - who monopolised the *patria potestas* (executive power of the father) in plantation homesteads.

Despite emancipation (1838 in the British West Indies) which according to some enabled Afro-American men for the first time to become patriarchal fathers (Frazier 1939: 146-159, 163-181), the image of the dead black father endured, as plantation kinship patterns continued amongst the labouring classes. Believed by the emerging middle-class to be a cause enduring poverty, fatherlessness became a rising welfare issue, as the Moyne Report (1938-9) – written 100 years after emancipation - stoked policy concerns around the supposed ‘problem’ of the lower-class Caribbean family (Putnam 2014). In this vein, renowned activist and social worker Amy Bailey called her natal Jamaica the ‘Land of Dead Fathers’. In a 1941 public letter she explained,

> By “dead” I do not just mean literally dead...[But] dead in spirit, dead to moral or practical responsibility for their children, dead to a civic responsibility towards Society and the State, dead in respect and consideration for womankind... There are large numbers of men in this country...who answer to the above description; who have children for whom they assume no responsibility; who have children whom they refuse to recognise, who have children of whom they are unaware... Those of us who do social work among the poor know only too well how many times the reply to the question “Where is the father of these children or this child?' is “He is dead.” More often than not, what the mothers really mean... is that they have no idea where he is (1941: 10).

For Bailey, lower-class black fathers, no longer displaced from family life by the plantation system, were now voluntarily absented from paternal responsibility and thus socially deceased.

During the 1950s-60s pioneering studies of West Indian kinship emerged as regional social policy discussion intensified. Like Bailey such studies concluded that the economic and social privations of the plantation had left Caribbean families ‘loose’ and ‘disintegrate’ (Simey 1946), ‘uncivilized’ (Mathews 1953: 302), ‘denuded’ (Clarke 1957), ‘normless’, ‘distorted’ (see RT Smith 1996: 35, 54) and ‘matrifocal’ (RT Smith 1956). The latter concept stuck as the most durable of early attempts to essentialise and ‘know’ ‘The Negro Family’. This included ‘explain[ing] - or explain[ing] away - such ‘abnormalities’ as ‘missing fathers’” (Trouillot 1992: 26). ‘Matrifocality’, positioned mothers as the
emotional and managerial mainstays of families, whilst fathers were ‘marginal’ appendages (RT Smith 1956: 142, 223) from whom ‘children derive practically nothing that is of importance’ and ‘do not suffer if they never see’ (1956: 147). So although Smith’s study noted the ideal of the married and authoritative husband-father (1956: 147), its legacy was the image of the ‘matrifocal’ family and ‘missing man’ (Blackwood 2005). Thus, the myth lived on.

Civil rights and black uprisings in the northern continent also peaked policy interest in US black families. Most famous was the 1965 Moynihan Report, which indicted the ‘Negro Family’ for its so called ‘matriarchal structure which… seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole’ (1965:75). The report unequivocally declared paternal absence as a root cause of black social pathology in America. As Spillers summarises, Moynihan suggested ‘the "Negro Family" has no Father to speak of - his Name, his Law, his Symbolic function mark the impressive missing agencies in the essential life of the black community’ (1987: 66). Hence, according to Moynihan to ‘restore’ the patriarchal father to the black family would be to cure a host of social ills facing Afro-Americans.

Today, the image of black families devoid of fathers lives on in the popular imaginaries of The US and Antilles. It is echoed in recurring appeals from pulpits and political lecterns for paternal engagement. Obama famously stated in 2008 to a 20,000-member church in Chicago’s predominantly black South Side,

Too many fathers are... missing from too many lives and too many homes...They have abandoned their responsibilities, acting like boys instead of men. And the foundations of our families are weaker because of it (New York Times, June 16 2008).

And throughout the Caribbean such discourses similarly abound, with heads of state admonishing men to play their part. Dominica’s Prime Minister Skerrit recently declared,

The issue of delinquent fathers is one that I will address... I hereby give early warning to those men who are able, but who are not taking proper care of their children, that their happy-go-lucky days are coming to an end, very soon (Dominica News Online, 26th July 2016)

Therefore, from plantation to present the image of the dead black father has haunted the Antilles and its northern neighbour, stubbornly persisting as a matter of public and private concern.
The myth frames black men as familial heads symbolically decapitated by slavery and continuing to irresponsibly rove the post-emancipation Americas. Thus, the myth of the dead father is a myth, not in the sense of being a falsehood, but rather ‘an ancient and lasting dream...an order which transcends both historical successions and contemporary correlations’ (Levi Strauss [1949] 1969: 491). In this dream/nightmare black families and fatherhood in particular, bear the burden of a seemingly inescapable past; an inescapable plantation.

Problems and Problématiques: Between Death and Life.

To take the myth as literal account is to be faced by two problems. The first is historic; the second contemporary. Firstly, Caribbean historiography has disputed the very premise that enslaved Antilleans formed entirely fatherless ‘matrifocal’ families. MG Smith contended that,

Even under slavery the father’s role was important in Carriacou. The slave-owner was by no means a father substitute; and male and female slaves shared responsibility for the nurture of their common offspring (1962: 24).

So although Carriacou was for Smith a peculiar historical case (with a unique lineage system, particular ‘mating’ patterns, no resident elite class and high marriage rates, 1962: 4-5) it nonetheless challenged the idea that plantation slavery inevitably denied fathering or ‘family’ (nuclear households).

Similarly, Higman used plantation records from early 19th-century Trinidad, Jamaica and Barbados to argue that ‘the nuclear rather than the “matrifocal” family was the dominant type’ amongst the enslaved (1975: 284). Of course Higman missed RT Smith’s caveat that ‘matrifocality is a property of the internal relations of male as well as female-headed households’, and even nuclear co-residential households are often matrifocal when paternal involvement is slight ([1973] 1996: 41–42). Nevertheless, the point here is that such accounts reveal a range of kinship plantation configurations; including those where black fathers could enact some paternal functions. However, Higman added that ‘too frequently... the supposed insignificance of the nuclear type has been taken as proof of destruction and disorganization in the Caribbean family system’ (1975: 284). Hence, an unexamined bias towards the nuclear family ideal on the part of the researcher often caused a dismissal of Caribbean family forms and practices that deviated from it, and a conflation of non-nuclearity with fatherlessness.
This leads me to the second problem, which does not concern the empirical validity of using the plantation to explain the present, but questions the contemporary motivations driving such explanations. Popular Caribbean histories are often deployed as pragmatic explicators for present problems. In this instance, narratives of past familial ‘destruction’ and ‘disorganisation’ are employed to explain aspects of kinship which are deemed ‘pathological’ (i.e. mother-centred households, male ‘marginality’, serial monogamy, \textit{de facto} polygyny^{18}). Hence, the original sin of slavery is used to make sense of family patterns perceived as sinful to the present Caribbean, or at least to its respectable stalwarts (religious leaders, politicians, media commentators). And this measure of sin is also gendered. Families seen to lack ‘a patriarchal man’ as authoritative head are seen as a problem – families without order (Blackwood 2005). ‘Matrifocality’ is always a negation, marked as non-normative by its very identification as ‘matrifocal’ - note how no one ever speaks of ‘patrifocal’ families, they are unmarked and normative (Strathern 2005). So in short, the story the Caribbean tells itself about fatherhood always refers back to the privations of the plantation scene, often imagining a very particular past to explain-away the present.

This plantation memory, in which the white master displaces and symbolically slays the black father, generates two enduring paternal archetypes; two ghosts, to invoke Walcott’s metaphor. The white ghost is that of the master, a patriarchal figure who has the means and might to provide, guide, protect and correct his kin; a (perverse) \textit{pater familia} if you will. This figure inhabits the authoritative Euro-American profile of the nuclear husband-father. Contemporary Caribbean society models fatherhood according to this ancestral ghost. As Fanon wrote of his countrymen,

\begin{quote}
The Martiniquan does not compare himself with the white man \textit{qua} father, leader, God: he compares himself with his fellow against the pattern of the white man (Fanon [1952] 2008: 167).
\end{quote}

In the post-independence West Indies (where white populations are small) this ‘pattern’ constitutes an apparition-like memory, a historical image, inherited by brown middle-class and elite men of status. Such men are lauded as ‘family men’, and can embody this norm.

The second ghost is that of the dead black father. His inheritors are the dispossessed of Antillean history; black men of the labouring classes, men of too limited means to realise hegemonic

---

^{18} See Merle Hodge (2002) for a rich analysis of such pathologisation.
fatherhood ideals. They are often depicted as ‘absent’, dead-beat or ‘shadowy figure[s] who drift... in and out’ of ‘matrifocal’ households (Liebow 1967: 3), to which they represent ‘marginal’ third elements (external to the mother-child dyad). Therefore, what is apparent in contemporary Caribbean society is a dialectical opposition between two paternal images, diametrically situated along lines of colour, class, authority and recognition. It is between this dialectic of paternal authority and its negation that Fathermen’s (this thesis’) problématique emerges.

*Fathermen*’s intervention is to use ground-level everyday participation in men’s lives, to offer a practical critique of the dead father myth; to demonstrate that men are not doing what dominant ideology suggests they are. I contend that the men I came know were neither entirely absent nor supreme patriarchs. Rather, they were real people reckoning with these divergent images of fathering and masculinity in complex ways; navigating various moments, relations and encounters along their life trajectories. *Father-men* refers to fathers and others who ‘father’ children; as well as the implications of kinship for masculine personhood.

My aim here is not to ignore the impact of history/memory on men or families – after all, ‘fragments’ of memory propel the cultural creativity of the Antilles (Walcott 1993). Rather, I aim to explore such creativity in the face of history; to explore the dissonances and dilemmas that Dominican men face as they creatively make fatherhood as beings in the world - both against and through these divergent black/white archetypes. So as Crichlou and Northover advocates, this is an ethnography that ‘maps the present’ (2009) as it explores pragmatic realities of Caribbean kinship. Herein, I see my Dominican interlocutors and friends as Fanon saw himself when he said: ‘The body of history does not determine a single one of my actions. I am my own foundation’ ([1952] 2008 180). So as much as the paternal journeys that follow are informed by plantation pasts and the contemporary stereotypes they precipitate, *Fathermen*’s protagonists often wrestle free of such crude circumscriptions. Hence, this thesis charts various struggles by black men to live as fathers; and thus to figuratively ‘flee the plantation’ (Crichlow 2009) – social death and all. But before plotting how each chapter will examine such paternal becoming, first an introduction to the ethnographic research that propels them.

*Fielding Fatherhood in Dominica*
This ethnographic enquiry took me to Dominica, the Eastern Caribbean homeland of my maternal kin for an 18-month period (October 2012-March 2014; returning July-August 2014). The
Commonwealth of Dominica is a mountainous island of 290 square miles, sandwiched between the French departments of Guadeloupe and Martinique, with a population of approximately 71,000 people – though this fluctuates with trans-Caribbean and metropolitan migration. Dominica's peoples are predominantly Afro-Caribbean with the ethnic mixing of indigenous Kalinago, French/French Antillean yeomen, British, ‘Syrian’ (i.e. Arab) and other Caribbean ancestries. Approx. 2,400 Kalinago (‘Island Carib’) citizens reside in the north-eastern Carib Territory (Hudepohl 2007: 4) and the country also has a large Haitian-born minority (approx. 1,050). Dominica's largest settlements are the capital Roseau, or ‘town’, to the south (approx. 14,000) and Portsmouth, in the north (approx. 3,000) on the Western Caribbean/Leeward coast. Other settlements dot the island's perimeter, along with several interior villages, in ‘a patchwork of enclaves’ often separated by rainforested mountains and valleys, with few connecting roads (Trouillot 1988).

I resided in Loubiere village (approx. 1,033), a mile south of ‘town’; though I also spent considerable time in Colihaut (9 miles south of Portsmouth, approx. 680) where I routinely visited aunts, cousins and spent the summer of 2013. I also visited Portsmouth and the Roseau valley frequently, spending time with extended family. Furthermore, I played/coached football and volunteered at a youth group in Newtown, a low-income Roseau neighbourhood between town and Loubiere, where I also developed many friendships. Across each of these sites I ‘observantly participated’19 (Lassiter 2005) in quotidian life, engaged in casual conversations and conducted semi-structured interviews with acquaintances, friends and family. Together these engagements yielded the ethnographic substance of this thesis. Methodologically, this entailed three angles of enquiry:

A concern with what people practically do and how they act towards kin. Method: observant-participation.

An apprehension of what they say they do or say is normatively occurring. Method: interviews; informal reflections.

19 See page 41 for a definition of this.
Attention to publicly held ideals, ideologies and official narratives concerning what should happen. Methods: recording media statements, speeches, collecting official documents, observing court proceedings.

Each of these angles on men’s kinship lives often elicited quite different realities. Epistemologically Fathermen sits between and attempts an overview of these diverse renderings of the social world.

Fathermen’s individual protagonists include more than 50 men, young and old; their mothers, lovers, ‘child-mothers’ (mothers of their children) and (grand)children. The men and women with whom I became friends were mostly working and lower middle-class black folk and some Kalinagos, although members of my family and men I worked with in CariMAN20 (Caribbean Male Action Network - a men’s activist group) afforded insight into brown middle and upper-middle-class life. Overall, I sought breadth of experience and perspective to populate this thesis. The contextual and methodological issues I have touched on here, I explore further in chapter 1 and return to throughout.

Before continuing, a brief comment on language use. Everyday Dominican parlance typically occurs in a hybrid mesolect which incorporates creole syntax with English vocabulary, whilst sprinkling this with kweyol/phrases and verbs to add emphasis or animate a statement. People readily code-switch into Francophone kweyol, the folk tongue of the island in informal contexts (e.g. the roadside bar) or into ‘the Queen’s English’ in formal settings (e.g. a courtroom). Kweyol is understood by Dominicans to be spoken with greater frequency in particular regions of the island (Grand Bay, Veille Casse, Colihaut, Soufriere), whilst ‘town’ is more readily associated with English21 (given its concentration of elites and English being the administrative language since the early 19th century). Throughout what follows I represent people’s speech as I heard it, switching between the

---

20 The Caribbean Male Action Network is a trans-Caribbean organisation with national chapters throughout the region whose mandate is to work with men towards gender justice and equality. CariMAN campaign on gender based violence, men’s (sexual) health, ‘positive fatherhood’, youth empowerment and anti-bullying. I became a member of CariMAN Dominica and attended/observed father’s meetings at primary schools, ‘anger management’ intervention workshops for youth who had been in trouble at school and community sports days promoting ‘family values’. In Dominica the organisation primarily functions as an organ for middle-class middle-aged men to speak on issues that concern them.

21 Koko, a third language is popularly spoken in the islands rural north east – notably in a village called Marigot.
mesolect, Kreyol and formal English. Next, a sketch of the thesis’ main contentions and a mapping of the chapters that follow.

**Predicaments in Kinship and Masculinity**

*Fathermen* documents the various quandaries that mark Dominican men’s kinship lives. These I call *kinship predicaments*:

- moments in kin trajectories that trouble established notions of fatherhood and masculine personhood;
- spark dissonances between hegemonic ideals and lived experiences;
- provoke quarrels between mother’s expectations and father’s practices;
- and expose incongruities between emerging forms and established norms.

*Predicaments* are the daily realities of such contradictions, informed by the histories discussed above, and grappled with in the lived present by men and their kin. Therefore, in what follows I suggest that far from being a quality of inherent togetherness – a ‘mutuality of being’ (Sahlins 2011) – kinship, for Caribbean men is characterised by tension, disjuncture and resolution (Brana-Schute 1976) in the making of relations throughout a lifetime. Beyond ideal imaginings, Dominican kinship is not a state of mutual being but a ‘process of becoming’ (Carsten 1995), something that is pragmatically made, abandoned and remade in the quotidian course of life (see Rodman 1971: 195-6). My main contention then, is that Dominican men practically enact kinship in ways that challenge prevailing ideology and stereotypical framings of what they are or should be doing.

This processual view of kinship is nothing new. However, the ethnographic record on men’s kinship lives is decidedly scant in the Caribbean (barring notable exceptions: Brown et al 1993; Fox 1999; Chevannes 2006; Olwig 2007: 93-117), hence, my portrayals of men becoming fathers, making children and contesting kinship designations throughout the lifecourse is, to my mind, a novel contribution of this work. So is its close-grained and intimate vantage, which in contradistinction to earlier works that sought to structurally locate male roles, sets out instead to explore their experiences, practices, affects and attitudes towards family (see Barrow 2010). Hence, men are undeniably ‘focal’ in this ethnography; and here, once again the work goes against the grain of the vast majority of explicitly and implicitly ‘matrifocal’ Caribbean kinship studies. My

---

22 I broadly draw this concept from Rutherford’s notion of ‘predicaments in masculinity’ (1992: 97). However, this is only a loose borrowing, for his use addresses a breakdown in identification between an infant ego and parental other. This he takes as metonymy for men’s communication more generally. Here I am interested in disjunctures in men’s kinship, specifically at the level of the social (interpersonal, societal and symbolic), rather than the psychic.
intention is for *Fathermen* to be read in dialogue with the feminist and mother-oriented kinship studies of Clarke (1957), Massiah (1983), Senior (1991), Bolles (1996), Harrison (1997) and Momsen (2002) amongst others, rather than a masculinist rebuttal to them (Mohammed 1998: 25-6). This complementarity should illuminate unexamined areas of kinship experience (e.g. paternal intimacies or sympathetic pregnancies), as well as speaking to established Caribbeanist patterns (e.g. matricentricity). The thesis is not an apology for Caribbean male iniquities (e.g. Dann 1987), but an account of the implications of patriarchy on/for men, as its subjects and supporters.

*Fathermen* is composed of 7 chapters, each organised around an idiom that was emphasised as significant to my interlocutor’s kinship lives. The exception being chapter 1, which also uses a local idiom, that of ‘making oneself’ (becoming socially ‘at home’), but does so to chart my own kinship/fieldwork journey: from a field of diasporic relations, into Dominica, a social field in which I would develop an *ethnography of relation* (a deeply participatory ethnographic disposition). The chapter discusses the coloured, classed and other social dislocations this process entailed – my own existential *predicaments* - as I was simultaneously made out by my hosts and ‘made myself’ (at home) in Dominica. In short, this chapter is about the ethnographic making of a social self and social relations, in a new yet familiar Caribbean place. The chapter foregrounds those that follow by working as an entry point into the setting and relations that produced this ethnography.

Chapter 2 examines a local phenomenon known as the *gwopwel* (‘GP’, ‘love sickness’), a heartbreak that afflicts deserted lovers. The chapter follows the fraught romantic and sexual relations that precede and accompany the tensions of parenting. Dominicans claim that men suffer, or rather, indulge the ‘GP’ far worse than women – not eating, sleeping and accusing women of bewitching them with love magic – all to the humour of their friends and neighbours. I ask why the phenomenon is funny and what it reveals of Dominican notions of gendered personhood, conjugal relations and romantic love. The chapter uses a lifecourse approach, arguing that along their conjugal careers men move from the crisis of the ‘GP’, to its avoidance, its explanation as love magic, and eventually learning to ‘grow in love’ with age. In sum, it traces men’s conjugal ‘tying’ into kinship across their lives.

Chapter 3 then explores the implication of fathers in the reproductive process. It considers the assignment of paternity through naming acts at various points in men’s fathering journeys. Here, I confront what I claim is a universal problem in anthropology – what I call *the problem of paternity*
(paternity’s putativity) - arguing that the problem is confronted through the multiple ways that ‘blood speaks’, as Dominicans say. That is, how relatedness reveals itself, confirming paternity in the bodies of kin: through a local version of the ‘couvade’ (sympathetic pregnancy) and other ‘mystics’ (enchanted happenings). The chapter highlights how physical fathering is mystically disclosed in men’s subtle bodies, interpersonally drawing them into reproduction. Whilst chapter 2 deals with men’s anxieties around becoming conjugally ‘tied’, this chapter surveys the contestation of physical parenthood - that which provides a basis for the material claims on the father that are discussed in chapter 4.

Chapter 4 dissects the normative dimensions of paternity, evinced by the poetic relation between economic provision and hands as metonyms for fatherly support. The chapter’s argument is that an ideal model of fathering figured around material provision is difficult to live up to amidst precarious economic conditions. I discuss the difficulties of ‘extending a hand’ amidst the economic precarity of a ‘hand to mout’ economy; analyse narratives of mothers whose ‘child-fathers’ ignore the aphorism that ‘one hand cyaa clap’ (parenting is an economic partnership) leaving them to provide as ‘mother and father’; and I discuss the paternal inculcations provision opens the way to –protection, guidance and correction – each employing the hand of the father in their own ways. In sum, the chapter asks whether the norms discussed situate fathering beyond reach, as something imaged on the divine, hence difficult for most men to realise. The chapter foregrounds those that follow by discussing normative expectations on fathers; behind which ‘hands on’ care is silent (chapter 5), and as the result of which fatherly recognition is informed by social class (chapter 6).

Chapter 5, by contrast to chapter 4, deals with the non-normative everyday acts of fathering. It investigates the intimate interstices of men’s private parenting worlds, grappling to understand the paradox between many father’s silent everyday emotional labour and their increasing public visibility in undertaking such acts. I argue that many men experience an incongruity between what they observably do and what they say they do, using my experience of failed interviews and rich observation as testament to this paradox. My aim is to offer a picture of global shifts towards intimate fathering practices as they manifest in contemporary Dominica, challenging local parenting ideology. I close the chapter by highlighting how Dominican dads are using online social media to present their burgeoning voices in an appeal for recognition as fathers ‘who care’.

21
Chapter 6 attends to the politics of recognition of fatherhood in Dominica, interrogating the lauded masculine profile of the ‘family man’ as a performance in distinction. It follows the redemptive life’s tale of felon-turned-father, Scratchie Dan, analysing an encounter outside a radio station in which his appeals to ‘family man’ status are rebuffed by a government minister. The chapter argues that paternal recognition in Dominica has little to do with a man’s paternal practice and everything to do with his classed, coloured and ‘respectable’ status. Thus, structural and symbolic inequalities intersect to deny some men paternal acknowledgement, whilst affording it to others. The chapter closes by employing ethnography as cultural critique, presenting interlocutors who speak back to their society, calling on those who police respectability - social workers, policy makers, priests and politicians - to publicly regard men of modest means as fathers. The chapter therefore brings the normative features of fathering depicted in chapter 4 and the silencing of chapter 5 into conversation, to ask who qualifies as a father in Dominican society.

Finally, Chapter 7 traces the transgenerational journeys of men as they move from being fathered, to fathering, to becoming papa (grandfathers). It argues that it often takes a reproductive lifetime to fully realise fatherhood. I suggest that age, experience, being freed from paternal imperatives and realising one’s mortality leads grandfathers and elder fathers to become more committed to their kin. However, as elder men move into a contracted socio-spatial routine and dwell more at home, they also develop ambivalence towards their insideness – enjoying the comfort of young kin, whilst reminiscing wistfully on their virile pasts. This chapter suggests that even when most deeply embedded in kin-life, elder men retain an affinity to the ‘outside’ world.

In Fathermen’s conclusion, I dwell on the question of absence: in my grandfather’s death, my own return from fieldwork to the UK and the image of the dead Caribbean father. I contend that the social generativity and continuity of physical departures troubles notions of absence, much as this thesis has troubled the myth of the dead father. I then meditate on the various ways Fathermen depicts the making of fathers, offering some tentative recommendations for how Dominica may overcome its tale of dead fathers.
Chapter 1. Emplacement and the Ethnography of Relation: ‘Making Myself’ in Dominica

‘Ok, so you are from here, but you more make yourself up there [in England], but you make yourself here now?’

Ralf, Rastafarian and horticulturist, Colihaut, Dominica

This chapter examines the process of undertaking fieldwork on male kinship lives in the small island home of my maternal kin. Here I ‘home-in’ on Dominica as an island situated in ‘relation’ to the world (Glissant 1997: 144) and me, reflecting on the practice of engaging anthropological research there. Specifically, I discuss how I followed relations to, developed relations in, and in the course of this, learned something of what it means to be related in local terms. And at the same time, I discuss how my emergent social participation, ‘making myself’, enabled me to intuitively learn a particular mode of ethnography.

Therefore, in what follows I first disentangle the diasporic and anthropological imaginings that motivated this journey. Second, I propose a methodological frame for the reflections that follow, inspired by Glissant’s suggestion of ‘ethnography as relation’ (Britton 2012; Glissant 1992). Through this frame, I posit relational self-making as a route of enquiry. I show how an ethnographic self, *my self* - moving through time, space, an emergent social field and set of kin relations - can act as a stimulus for human/ethnographic dialogue. Next, I demonstrate the various instantiations of this ethnographic mode by discussing how I was dialogically made-out by my hosts and ‘made myself’, established a social personality and made home, in this new milieu. Finally, I conclude by discussing the colour/class-based nicknames that friends resolved to accommodate me, offering a working sense of emplacement by the latter end of my time ‘on island’. In short, this chapter is a methodological framing of an ethnographic/diasporic/kinship journey into a Caribbean place.

*Intimate Inspirations*

As anthropologists, a variety of motivations move us to embark on ethnographic journeys. Philosophical ideals, intellectual curiosities, ethical convictions, or simply intuition drive us to learn
more of the people, places and processes we seek to understand. Anthropological enquiries begin with a feeling, believing or sceptical anthropological self. Through fieldwork we trace paths outwards from the familiarity of our lived worlds, seeking dwelling and dialogue with those we learn from, about and with. This ethnographic exploration of Dominican men’s kinship lives is no different. Yet, it begins not only with the self, but an intimate kinship world that I inhabit; routing its inspiration through diasporic imaginings that span a vast transatlantic field of familial proximity and separation. These imaginings connect Bristol - the English port city of my birth, built on the profits of slave-trading, sugar, tobacco and cocoa - where my arrivant maternal grandparents set up home, raised four children and found work at Wills’ Tobacco and Cadbury’s Chocolate factories; with Dominica, the mountainous island from whence they departed in 1956, leaving behind the familiar rhythms of life, friends, and family - including several ‘outside children’.

Figure 4 ‘Arrivants’. From a photo taken in 1956 of Auntie Hilma (Mendes and Grandma’s first child) and Grandma. Mixed-media portrait reproduced by mum (Roslyn Philogene).
Separating from my grandfather a decade after arriving in England, my grandmother raised my mother and her siblings alone, occasionally sending them across town to their father for money, clothes and school supplies. Some years later my grandfather, Peter Mendes Philogene, took early retirement in declining health and returned to Colihaut, the rural Dominican fishing village of his birth – 29 years after departing Dominica. Grandma, Alaskar Philogene, ran her household, sent her children to school, assigned chores and worked the ‘provision garden’ of her semi-detached council house in the best way she might have hoped to back home (growing ‘Irish’ instead of sweet potatoes, of course). She devoutly attended Methodist church every Sunday - often-times twice - and immaculately dressed her children accordingly. She ‘sent down’ periodic letters and ‘a few pounds’, a ‘nice little dress’ and soap at Christmas or birthdays for her two eldest daughters who remained in Dominica – one with a foster mother in town, the other with her brother in Portsmouth (Dominica’s northern town). These modest yet consistent packages of maternal care ensured grandma’s sustained extra-local presence in the lives of her daughters. They showed that despite her physical absence, she had not ‘forgotten’ her children who had been ‘left behind’. ‘Nobody ever got an empty envelope’, the younger fondly recalled once. But, although speaking daily of a place called Dominica, evoking its presence through daily household chatter in her francophone kweyol, grandma was never to return home or see her ‘big daughters’ throughout her 41 years in England.

In December 2010, shortly after completing my undergraduate studies, I received a text-message from a cousin – also a grandson of Mendes and Alaskar, also born in Bristol. The message read that he was soon to become a father, followed by the invitation that I become the infant’s godfather. This new role in the life of my cousin’s child, and more importantly what I observed of his attentive fatherhood and the challenges he faced in gaining access to his son following frictions with his ‘child-mother’, led me to reflect on the diverse possibilities, meanings and complications of fatherhood. It is with such reflections that this enquiry came into being. And if

---

23 A parenting pattern familiar throughout the Antilles (see for example Lazarus-Black 1995: 59-62).
24 These quotes are from a conversation with the younger of the two daughters on Christmas day 2013 as she fondly recalls queuing ‘as everyone did’ for her package from England at the Roseau post office.
25 For elaboration on this theme of extraterritorial presence and the material expression of love by migrant parents – known as being ‘out of state but still in mind’ (Seller 2005).
this motivation was not enough, a nagging desire to know Peter Mendes Philogene and my other maternal kin, as well as the island itself, certainly drew me to Dominica.

Figure 5 Mendes' departure for Dominica, 1985 – (left to right) cousin, aunt’s husband and aunt; Mendes; mum and my elder sister

I did not know Mendes, but I knew grandma. The gwuayé (daily struggles) of life as a single-mother in an unwelcoming land had taken a toll on her sanity and my only first-hand memories of her were at a bedside in a psychiatric home. Nonetheless I knew her. I knew her through what she represented. She symbolized the moral landscape of my maternal home. We (me and my elder sister by mother) knew her through stories, proverbs and parables inherited and recited by my mother and through an enduring set of values that fostered into a third generation a ‘presence Dom’niken’26. By this I mean that although we grew up in Britain, grandma had, through mum, instilled the sense of an elsewhere that was ours (an experience common to many Caribbean migrants’ (grand)children; see Reynolds 2006). Dominica was at once a mythical though real place where mum had big sisters and we had aunts and cousins. A place that even if unable to visit we could in an abstract way call ‘home’ and imagine belonging. Where our minds might wander to

26Here I intentionally invoke Stuart Hall’s notion of the presence Africaine in the Caribbean social imaginary (1990) – a latent, silenced though undeniable presence in Afro-Caribbean modes of being (speech, spiritual practices, foods, and so on). Something I see echoed in the ancestral inheritances of Caribbeans ‘twice diasporized’ in the UK.
seek psychic refuge in times of personal need - a faculty surely inherited from grandma. Thus, in as much as we knew her, we identified with and felt we knew a place called Dominica. Yet this man Mendes Philogene, on the other hand, he was someone – much like the real Dominica and living contemporary Dominicans – that I did not know. He was a man who in many ways, from my mother’s fragmented descriptions, resembled the caricature of the marginal Caribbean father I had begun to read about (and discussed in the intro).

Who was this man? He had returned to Dominica before my birth and perhaps (like me) had no recollection of us ever meeting. The first and only time I was in Dominica I was a baby, hence our only interactions occurred before ‘I know myself’, as Dominicans term their entry into conscious memory. I was determined to go to Dominica and meet this man, Peter Mendes Philogene. But, in a sense both this man and the Dominican men/fathers I was embarking on a quest to meet, had psychically converged. Whilst I had set out to know the former personally and as kin, and the latter ethnographically and (hopefully) as friends, they were now figuratively synonymous in my imagination as the unfathomed protagonists of the enquiry. In retrospect, this convergence is unsurprising given the tendency of the anthropological vocation to pull so much of our personal existence into its remit. Such a convergence was probably inevitable given the choice of a research theme that is so close to ‘home’. That said, if I would have to accept the fundamental confluence of personal and ethnographic that underpins this project, I would also have to accept - like most Dominicans who invest faith in divine providence; and ethnographers who confront unpredictable social worlds – that many things are beyond our control.

On the 24th of March 2012, six months after transforming preliminary meditations into an embryonic PhD project, I received another message from a cousin. This time from Christabel, the daughter of Auntie Joan, one of Grandma’s ‘big daughters’ in Dominica. It read that Oncle Mendes – as my grandfather was known to his village – was unwell. I messaged her back immediately informing that I had notified the family in the UK and my mother would call her.

27 In my echoing refrain ‘this man’ I borrow a motif from Jamaica Kincaid’s paternal memoir, Mr Potter (2002), a post-mortem excavation of the life story of a distant and indifferent father. She repeats the name ‘Roderick Potter’ and the statement ‘he was a man and he was my father’ throughout the book to evoke the figurative outline of a man whose surname (author nee. Cynthia Potter) and looks she inherited, but about whom she knew substantively little.
28 Hereafter referred to as Auntie.
Christabel replied the following day,

... I did tell him that I communicated with your mom and he seemed extremely pleased – he was giving so many kisses – I think I got the kisses for all of you. This must mean something. I would attempt to call your mom from the hospital, but he won't be able to respond so I am not sure whether this makes any sense.

Peter Mendes Philogene died at 1:15am on the 25th March 2012 at the Princess Margaret Hospital, Roseau. Although the taking of exams prohibited me from accompanying my mother to the funeral I would arrive in Dominica to begin fieldwork some months later (2nd October 2012).

Upon my first trip to my grandfather’s natal village of Colihaut, an aunt introduced me to his ‘partner’ (close friend), Mr Shillingford - a fellow returnee from England and owner of a rum shop in which they sat together most days chatting and playing cards. Tears welled up in the eyes of the tall brown man as he studied my face for traces of his departed friend; gripping me in a handshake. ‘I feel like I’ve arrived too late’, I uttered, breaking the silence that had enveloped us. Gathering himself he returned a reassuring smile and added, ‘nothing happens before its time’; then offered me a drink.

Locating its point of departure between a birth and death, this enquiry on paternal lives is inspired by moments that mark the beginning and end of the life-course of the father. Before I begin the extended discussion of my physical and social journey into place, I shall briefly elaborate a methodologic frame of this chapter and thesis more generally.

On Method: Ethnography as Relation

First, a caveat. It is important to note that the neat order of this chapter - both the theory of my research and examples of ethnographic method – do not reflect the chronology of my fieldwork. Rather, I arrived in Dominica as a neophyte ethnographer familiar with an array of research techniques (interviews, participant observation, video recordings, soundscapes etc.) yet, elected to peripheralise most methods in favour of social participation. It is only in retrospective consideration of this instinctual approach (well after completing fieldwork) that I realised I was engaged in what has been termed ‘ethnography as relation’ (Britton 2012).

A brief comment on this ethnographic disposition. Martiniquan theorist Edouard Glissant developed a theory of The Antilles as an evolving cosmopolitan space that exists in historic and
contemporary ‘relation’ to the world; a place of becoming, where worlds meet and social forms emerge (1997; 2008). Glissant termed his theory the *Poétique de la Relation* (*Poetics of Relation*, 1997) to denote the rhythmic play between local and extra-local categories - e.g. origins, ethnicities, colours, genders, values, moralities – that imbues quotidian Caribbean life. Glissant also wrote on ethnography (1992), which in its orthodox incarnation he loathed for its reification of difference; for its Othering impulse; for its coloniality. But most of all as, Britton notes,

Glissant’s hostility to traditional ethnography stems precisely from its refusal to enter into relation with its subjects ... its refusal, in other words, to grant its subjects the possibility of ‘looking back’ at the ethnographers’ own culture (2012: 47)

However, he did endorse a particular ethnography exemplified by Leiris, a pioneering 1950s anticolonial French ethnologist working in Martinique. For Glissant, Leiris, saw the ‘need to participate in the culture he is investigating, which from the start takes precedence over what he calls “abstract knowledge”’ (Britton 2012: 43). This approach to ‘ethnography as relation’ is perhaps best summed up by Kullberg, who describes it as ‘a discourse of becoming that can seize being in the process of change as it faces the Other, leading to a kind of relational epistemology’ (2013: 77).

In the remainder of this chapter I endeavour to show how I instinctively and organically developed such an emergent relational method of understanding. How the gaze of my hosts turned back on me, and how my participation in the village and family lives of my hosts, friends and kin drew us into inevitable dialogue; into relation. I discuss initial perceptions of me as a distrusted, transient and privileged ‘white’ stranger who dwelt in a gated house apart from the community – thus refusing relation. I then go on to show how, with time, transgression of class-coded spaces, living in humbler dwellings and my demonstration of kinship and community participation – such relation developed.

In short, here is an approach to ethnography that is not predicated on objectively knowing ‘The Other’, but an intuitive research praxis that is embedded in a wider process of evolving mutual understanding and participation, of which ethnographic documentation is just part – alongside friendship, kinship, voluntary service and extended human interaction. And central to all this are

---

the ever-present themes of time and space. Time: as co-presence, fluency of behaviour and nurtured trust, each developed through a long-term commitment to place. Space: as the physical and social distance between class-defined village sites and between disparate categories of person, which persistent colour-class ‘border crossings’ (Behar 1993) caused to diminish through time.

This ethnographic journey follows my grandfather’s return migration path through what Olwig (2007) calls a ‘field of relations’, a scattered transatlantic network of kin. Hence, my fieldwork route between The UK and Dominica involved the complex process of moving through this field: meeting, reactivating and making relations with kin; whilst investigating what it means to experientially be(come) kin on the terms of my socio-spatial relocation. And alongside such first-hand kinning was the process of commuting into, dwelling and seeking understanding in the fields of relations of those I would eventually know, and who would come to know me, as interlocutor and friend. In sum, moving from the UK to the Antilles through a dispersed field of relations, I engaged ethnography as relation in the process of experiencing and understanding Dominican kinship relations.

**Dominican Dislocations**

For all the ties positioning me in relation to Dominica, it must be emphasised that my entry into its insular milieu entailed considerable dislocation. The social jolt of my arrival was two-fold: evident in both local perceptions of my foreignness and the limitations this placed on my ability to participate in village life; as I will now show.

**An Arrival; Locating Loubiere**

On the night of the 2nd of October 2012, a dual propeller plane dipped from the dark sky above the Atlantic Ocean, onto a moonlit airstrip beneath the towering mountains of Dominica’s north eastern corner. On-board were a dozen or so overseas students starting a semester on either of the island’s North American medical schools, a small number of Haitian emigrants and dozens of Dominicans who reside overseas. The latter were returning, as many do each year, to reconnect with family and friends during the month-long independence celebrations (October to
November). My cousin, Christabel, had recommended this time of island-wide fêteing, familial reunion and heritage celebration\textsuperscript{30} as an ideal time to arrive.

Over the years, my mother (scribe of grandma’s dictated letters) developed a relationship with the younger of her sisters in Dominica (Auntie), a relationship which they sustained across vast distance and the passage of time (before and after meeting for the first time in the late 1970s). This relationship opened the way for cousins of my generation to utilise the emerging vectors of Facebook, email and more recently Skype and WhatsApp to create and sustain our own transatlantic relationships - sharing daily happenings and life events via photos, (video) calls and text messages. In advance of fieldwork I contacted Christabel (Auntie’s daughter) about accommodation and suggestions on village field sites. Christabel has a dutiful enthusiasm for managing family affairs. A committed teacher and former athlete, she took this administrative invitation and ran with it—faithfully embracing the responsibility of housing her cousin.

\textit{Correspondence with Christabel (23-8-12):}

Adom,

I am going to look for a small apartment for you…. In Dominica, rooms for rent are not usually the norm, apart from that, if you are going to be doing research, you will want your own space. I know you mentioned a room in someone house, but I would advise against that at this point because things are hard financially in Dominica and I do not want you to be taken advantage of, or anyone to interfere with your stuff while you are out...

Until...

Christabel located Loubiere, just south of Roseau and Auntie’s home, as a convenient research site. A junction between town, villages to the south west and Grand Bay in the south east, Christabel (familiar with anthropology from her American university days) identified Loubiere’s social traffic as being rich in ethnographic potential. Indeed, as I would discover Loubiere’s rum shops, savannah and bay-side fishing activities offered animated sites of community sociality;

\textsuperscript{30}Featuring such Creole national traditions as \textit{belet} dancing, playing \textit{jing-ping} music and traditional \textit{krik-kra}k storytelling (for such living heritage celebrations see Rose 2009a).
spaces to meet and spark conversation. Furthermore, she had recognized the diversity of fisherfolk, horticultural smallholders, unemployed youth, builders, quarry workers, market vendors, bus drivers, retired returnees, entrepreneurs and professionals that make up Loubiere’s population as offering a breadth of perspective on kinship. Finally, and perhaps most importantly for my cousin, the fact of my being so close to Auntie’s home – where Christabel, her step-father, sister and nieces reside – would provide me the personal autonomy afforded to young male kin, whilst placing me close enough to monitor my day-to-day welfare. The latter was her duty towards a cousin who ‘come out Englan to do a research’.

**Dominican rebirth: ‘white boy in de white house’**

I was naively unprepared for the extent to which I would be perceived as foreign in Dominica. In truth, I knew little of what to expect of somewhere I had dreamt and ‘known’ through family narrative, yet had no first-hand memory/knowledge of. In Dominica and much of the Antilles, colonial societies in origin and enduring ambience (Mintz 1965), persons are seen through hierarchical prisms of class, colour and degrees of local or foreignness. Such differentiations have great everyday significance and provide working schemes for addressing particular categories of person. Given my ‘high colour’, English accent and overseas upbringing, I was identified as anything but Dominican within such schemes. Though identifying variably as ‘mixed race’ or ‘Black’ in the UK, in Dominica I was addressed in a manner far from how I saw myself: as ‘white boy’.

*Figure 6 The “White House”*
‘So how you like Dominica so far?’, asked Sister Sorhaindo, my ageable new neighbour as we met one morning on our shared veranda in the grand house where Christabel had found me an apartment. ‘I think it’s lovely’, I answered, reminded of many warm encounters; ‘I have met lots of very kind people so far’. She paused in thought, then refocusing she responded, ‘but you are only just born. You are only just born in Dominica’. A light chuckle left her lips as her eyes wandered towards some shrubs and she began pruning.

I did not understand what Sister Sorhaindo meant at the time. Yet, reflecting on my residence in Dominica, her idiom of rebirth now seems apt for framing my entrance into this new social world and the processes of becoming it necessitated. Her words gestured towards the socializing forces that provoked my arriving self into becoming a person; the embodied terms of this becoming; and my own self-making action herein. And through this process of being socially constituted from without and dialogically asserting my own personality from within, I – as an ethnographer, ‘English man’, diasporic Dominican, ‘white man’, ‘foreigner’, shabin – became anew; learning some of what it means to become a person and kin in Dominica.

In the early months of my time living in the house of Pastor Pinard, Ma Pinard (his wife) and Sister Sorhaindo, I learnt too of my hosts’ perceptions and expectations of me. They were upright, ‘god fearing’ people. Good people. They were pristine in image and dress, and ascetic in worship; attending the Seventh Day Church of God (where Mr Pinard preaches) at least three times weekly. Middle-class retirees who worked most of their adult lives and raised children in St Thomas (US Virgin Islands), the Pinards lived a ‘quiet’, private existence, moving around by air-conditioned Jeep to a gospel music soundtrack; socially apart from village life down the hill. This was the life they had re-made for themselves since moving home ten years earlier, leaving adult children and grandchildren (with whom they speak daily) in St Thomas and America.

Entering their gates as Christabel had described me to them – a student from England, working on a PhD – it was presumed from my educational position, accent, foreignness and ‘high

31 Variously written Chabin(e), Shabeh(-ine): a colour category Martiniquan novelist Chamoiseau defines as ‘a light skinned mixed race individual with blonde or reddish hair and black facial features. A European [Breton] name for a kind of sheep produced by cross-breeding a ewe with a billygoat’ (Chamoiseau 1999). Mulot distinguishes between the Shabin and Metis (‘mulatto’), the latter being an offspring of white and black parents, thus a direct inheritor of white privilege (typically from a European father); whilst the shabine is symbol of the historical Caribbean admixture (Mulot 2008; Walcott 1977).
pigmentation’ that this orderly world was the place for someone like me. My landlords welcomed me into their world of propriety. They understood that I would need distance from ‘distraction’, privacy to do my work undisturbed and the security afforded by our tall whitewashed walls. Ma Pinard delivered periodic warnings not to ‘follow bad friend’, fall-in with the wrong company who might stray me from my ‘mission’. She was alluding to the figure of the village youth, perceived by respectable elders to do little more than stand all day on ‘the block’, ‘smoking drugs’ (ganja), cursing and fighting. This anxiety inducing caricature represented the complete inversion of the stereotypical profile ascribed to me by my middle-class hosts.

Whilst with the Pinards I experienced two sides to the whiteness I was perceived to represent. By Mr Pinard I was at once treated with a deferential formality, being addressed as ‘Sir’ and greeted with handshakes as we chatted in the yard. However, he would also refer to me being ‘like a son’ to he and his wife. This honorary kinship title carried a protective paternalism which was exaggerated, I think, by popular ideas about white men having an inherently weak physical constitution (‘people does believe dey soft’, a friend once verified) and great wealth, which when combined, made them vulnerable to being ‘taken advantage of’ (financially\(^{32}\)). This paternalism became vividly apparent the day I invited over a Rastafarian friend, Cleve, who I had interviewed and was editing music video for. Watching us enter the gate Mr Pinard swiftly summoned me upstairs. He informed that they did not want ‘anyone like him’ (a thin gloss for kawant, ‘vagabond’) in their yard. Although this anxious response was presumably to my friend’s polluting presence in the yard (they had effectively kept the village at arm’s length by ‘not interfering with Loubiere people’ until my arrival) I also believe the mixing of apparently incompatible categories of person – unkempt Rastaman from the bay and ‘white boy’ from Englan’ – was also cause for concern; making me vulnerable to some form of threat.

Although keen to reassure me of Dominica’s relative safety, the Pinards repeatedly cited an incident where their former tenant, a medical student, had ‘got himself in pwoblem’ at a nearby village fête, and was beaten and robbed. They issued stern warnings to ‘be careful!’; to avoid a

\(^{32}\) That white people are presumed to be vulnerable to economic exploitation by black Dominicans may be interpreted as an irony and residual trace of white supremacist ideology (specifically, white fragility) in a region still scarred by the converse, white on black exploitation.
similar fate. Similarly, Mr Pinard, who was not one to be in a quarrel or have enemies, also mentioned the time a man attacked him unprovoked outside of the house, prompting him to install the security fence. In short, on the potential perils of village life, I had been warned.

My family would issue similar warnings. Although living by the bay, less well-off (not having migrated) and more of an everyday participant in community life, Auntie is of a similar age and outlook to the Pinards. Early on she admonished me never to accept anything to smoke or drink from so called ‘friends’. And in the evenings, when I would sit ‘by them’ until after ten watching the local news, chatting with cousins, playing with the children and hearing ‘old time’ stories of a bygone Dominica, Auntie would suddenly realise the time, and insist that Christabel ‘drop me up’. My protests that ‘rain was not falling’ and the 15-minute walk along L’alée Koko (a dark cliff and palm covered road) was perfectly safe, often fell upon deaf ears. In one instance Christabel made my plea: ‘Mummy he will be fine, he is a big man’, to which Auntie swiftly replied, ‘don’t forget that he is a white man you know’, conclusively prompting Christabel to go for her keys.

Therefore, uncomfortably reborn a ‘white boy’, I would quickly comprehend the meaning and extent of my foreignness. Yet, it would take me longer to realise a most salient implication of this: that my body (phenotype, techniques) and social persona, through interactions with other categories of people, provoked my middle-class landlords and family to express local ideas about social class, colour and foreignness. Similarly, leaving the Pinard’s enclave and seeking participation in the lives of Loubiere’s working-class residents, I would also discover how class-coded space and social distance were also revealed by my transgression of their boundaries.

**Village Encounters**

Each morning I would leave the gate of the Pinard’s residence, being sure to bolt it as instructed, and head down into the village. Whilst Loubiere, like its neighbouring communities, extends up onto the mornes (hills) that ascend from the Caribbean Sea into Dominica’s rainforested interior, most of the village life occurs along the densely populated coastal road that traces the island’s perimeter. Generally, the dwellings of ‘lower-class’ residents line this bay-side road in a patchwork of wooden shacks, ‘block houses’ and rum shops. Equally, the relatively better-off - those ‘that have’ - live in suburban-style residences up the hill. This contemporary socio-spatial
patterning of coastal villages like Loubiere derives from the island’s plantation history. In 1838, emancipated captives refusing to continue labouring on estates for former masters were evicted from plots on which they had chattel houses and held provision gardens. With colonial laws restricting the purchase of land to large portions by a single owner, the masses were forced to ‘squat’ within ‘the Queen’s three chains’, the 66-yard strip of ‘Crown Land’ that extends inland from the sea/ocean around the island (Honychurch 2001). Consequently, the spaces of ‘de bay’ and ‘de road’ emerged as arenas of lower-class dwelling and interaction. Literally and symbolically, the bay became a site of refuse, where the household and bodily waste of its tightly-packed population were discarded. However, the road and bay also became a place of life: where the bounties of skilled fisherfolk were brought from the sea; where babies were taken for curative ‘sea baths’; where tales of adventure were shared at Domino tables in roadside rum shops; where young men’s ‘respec’ was ‘paid’ (earned) and undermined; where women’s respectable names were besmirched through mepwi (the defamatory diatribes of female enemies); and where ‘liming’ - that spontaneous Caribbean pursuit of ‘pulling-up’ (loafing), drinking, and enjoying life was shared in. In short, the flat – despite its symbolic marginality – continues in all its vitality, to be the folk centre of village life, especially for men.

Fast forward to the 1970s/80s comes the closure and lotting of Loubiere’s unprofiting banana and citrus estates (dealt the fatal blow of Hurricane David in 1979); followed by upwardly aspiring Dominicans – including overseas returnees like the Pinards – eventually building homes in the upper parts of the village. Though the houses of some poorer villagers were built on marginal former estate lands, along roads and above falaises (escarpments) in the higher sections of the village, generally Loubiere’s classed spatial contours persist. Therefore, a fundamental starting point in developing relations and friendships amongst gens Loub’ye (Loubiere folk) was to step from the proverbial anthropologist’s veranda that the Pinard’s enclave was unintentionally becoming, and heading down the road. Methodologically, this was to seek participation in village life beyond the privileged distance of my prescribed ‘respectable’ enclave.

On the flat I encountered many of Loubiere’s personalities, those who would become close friends as well as those with whom early interactions were more ambivalent, testing or who assumed I

---

34 Laws designed to exclude the newly free from acquiring land, thus tie them and their labour to plantations.
was passing visitor. Amongst many I sensed a quiet distrust. My polite roadside greetings\textsuperscript{35}, as an unknown visitor, provoked a sober formality. Perhaps, my traversal of the social distance typically maintained between foreigners (or bourgeoisie locals) of my ‘high’ hue and ‘lower-class’ Dominicans was unexpected. My niceties were not clearly intentioned and hence treated with suspicion. Anthropologist Angrosino learned during fieldwork in an Indo-Trinidad village, that the ‘most threatening are those at any extreme...of the respectability-reputation continuum’ (1986: 65). Thus, positing me on a Creole continuum of values that situates people towards the symbolic poles of ‘reputation’ (egalitarianism, the road, the bay, \textit{Patwa}, trickery, blackness) and respectability (hierarchy, the family, home, standard English, the church, manners, whiteness), I, as ‘a white man’, most certainly represented the latter Eurocentric end of this spectrum to many villagers (see Wilson 1969). For some I was just a rich ‘white boy’; for others, I was regarded with resentment as inheritor of the economic and symbolic privilege of English oppressors.

To others, my appearance seemed more ambiguous. Some assumed from my ‘high colour’ and metropolitan bodily style that I was a ‘French man’\textsuperscript{36}, a \textit{shabin} holidaying from Mat’nik or \textit{Gwad’loup}; an American peace corps volunteer; a medical student; a tourist; or some other transitory individual stopping in the village \textit{en route} to elsewhere before going ‘back up’, to ‘whatever big country you come out’, as a young man put it. For some I presented an opportunity to ‘mek a quick change’ (money). I met Booga, the likeable gamin of the village from whom I unknowingly bought force-ripe vegetables for Auntie, only to realise they had been pilfered from someone’s garden. I also met Ali, mother-of-two and hair salon owner, who enthusiastically obliged my request for a ‘plait-up’, proceeding to charge what I would later learn is three-times the going rate for a simple ‘kango’, (‘cornrow’ style). And then there were the ‘block boys’ - young watchmen of the passing world who stood by the graffitied public toilet, ‘on the block’, their notorious roadside stage; vying for respect, stationed in service of a tense and brittle manhood. ‘What it ave in the bag, nuh, white boy?’; ‘Make a drink, nuh, white boy!?’, ordered the more

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{35}What Rapport (2012: 10) calls ‘cosmopolitan politesse’, a basic recognition of the universal humanity of an unknown other - intended as a ground from which to develop relations. However, in a context where liberal British performative politesse - ‘manners’ - has veiled the violence of dehumanising social relations between colours and classes, such politesse often arouses suspicion. Hence manners - ‘social politeness’ – unsurprisingly fail to convey an alignment with ‘politeness of heart’ and ‘spirit’ in this context (Bergson in Rapport 2012: 9-10).

\textsuperscript{36}As Dominicans refer to those of the French Antilles.}
outspoken, seeking to draw me into the egalitarian claim and counter-claim block economy if I lingered too long when passing from the supermarket or chatting with a ‘partner’ who might be standing there.

Initially, I tried to sidestep these claims, challenging this ascribed whiteness. ‘White boy!’, one member of the group called out at a pre-Carnival fête. I knew a demand was coming. ‘I’m not white’, I entered, trying to cut him short before an order arrived. ‘What de fock are you den?’. ‘Not white’, I retorted stubbornly. ‘OK red man, make a focking drink!’ In this moment, it was suddenly clear that I had little handle on other’s perception of me. Vocal protests would not alter this.

Whether ‘white’ or its local approximation, ‘red’, getting to grips with the meaning of this new designation, and then idiosyncratically adapting it to fit me, would be a gradual undertaking. On occasion I obliged these demands, buying a round of drinks or sharing food; seeking to show a willing generosity, in keeping with the egalitarian ethos of sharing that I understood to characterise such peer relations. In one instance, I even shrugged off the appeals of a friend and ‘block boy’ who insisted I should not feel obliged by such demands. Whilst I would learn that cross-class relations are often economically furnished and feature an ethic of benefaction (giving balanced with loyalty), early material interactions informed me that to appear too financially forthcoming is to be perceived as ‘soft’. And, as I was instructed by the interjecting friend, this encourages others to ‘take foot on’ (‘take advantage’ of) the giver. Furthermore, over time it also became clear that the peer recognition necessary to inhabit spaces like the block could not be bought, but had to be ‘paid’ (earned). I realised that it would develop gradually, through a willingness to respond un-phased to the daily challenges of earning and sustaining a minimum level ‘respect’.

Beyond the block, nowhere was masculine respect more fiercely fought for than the village savannah during the afternoon ‘sweat’ (small-goal football match). As the name suggests, ‘the sweat’ features masculine vigour and finesse, performed with an urgent intensity through interpersonal battles of will, skill and strength between opponents. Each weekday from 5pm as the sun begins its descent, young men and a few teenage girls ‘pull up’, smoke and chat by the river beneath the mango tree and watch the 10-30 player spectacle unfold. The scene’s twilight serenity is juxtaposed against its seemingly chaotic internal heat. Both players and audience
remark – "moda-ass!!" - at hard tackles and shots; laugh at or lambaste errors; and applaud skilful feats - "yes I! de boy real!" - when one player wizays another.

Joining this activity, I came to experience the levelling ground of the ball field. Situated at the foot of a valley cradled by hills and mountains, the savannah stands between the sharp social and topographic relief of the village, bringing together an array of classes and shades who would not otherwise experience such proximity. Since I ‘come out Englan’, I was presumed to possess some of the skills of English Premiere League stars featured on Dominican TV, but lack the toughness demanded by the local game. My presence on the field of play offered the opportunity to temporarily invert perceived (coloured/classed) inequities. I received robust shoulder barges, tackles and goads from opponents to put me off my game - ‘everybody know white man cannot boom [strike] de ball haa’d!’ Or where I might protest an opponent’s forceful tackle - ‘why you crying boy? Dom’nica [is where] you be!’ And my teammates offered little sympathy, rebuking ‘what is that for me, nuh, white boy?!’ or ‘play hard, nuh, white boy!’ following someone barging the ball from me.

In short, my initial involvement in the play-space of the sweat reflected my introduction to village public space and working-class life more generally: a pattern of gesturing towards participation (i.e. supporting entrepreneurship, buying drinks, ‘sweating’) then facing robust or advantageous challenges which sought to confirm my ‘softness’ and put me back in my place (i.e. the ‘white house’ or other bourgeois spaces). However, in time I would appreciate that such challenges need not result in the reinforcement of social distance, but could also encourage social learning.

**Becoming Socially Competent**

Perhaps my robust welcome to the sweat and block were not simply a rejection of privileged otherness by village males. They were more ambivalent than this. They represented an expression of territory and opposition to the sense of superiority I was presumed to embody. An intimidating reminder of exactly where I was; a signal to ward off the meek and insist that the pigmentocratic privilege of the dominant society was of little benefit to me in their realm. And yet, with such

---

37 Wizay (lit. Tired). To wizay somebody in football is to tire them out with fast feet and quick improvisation. Such showmanship is highly valued, and thus greater tolerance of losing possession or making an error during an audacious attempt at a difficult skill is granted. Successful showmen are offered passes more regularly and lambasted less or even told ‘nice try’ at unsuccessful attempts at a skill.
challenges my participation in these spaces was, in a perverse sense, also being provoked. Paradoxically, this hostility afforded to fast-track me, if willing, into the kind of boldness of person that is valorised in Dominica. For example, sweating 3–4 times weekly I adjusted to the tests of the savannah, the kind young men present one-another with daily, developing a hardy physical playing style, joining a respected nearby team and ‘holding my end’ in heated discussions about local and international football. Each of these contributed to my assertion of personality and developing a boldness of self on a community stage.

This assertion of personality - being ‘good for yourself’ - is encouraged, teased out of people from infancy. It is valued as a distinctly Dominican/black personal quality. It is conveyed in oral performances and other self-preserving expressions of will. It is encouraged amongst children for it equips them with the toughness and wit to navigate the competitive aspects of village life. Asking a friend in her 20s what being ‘good for yourself’ means, she began with an example of a child,

Saryta: I would say the child very determined or persistent. Or bold.... My mother tells me that whenever I'm feisty.

Me: Is it a good thing for a child to be?
Saryta: In my opinion yes.... because in a sense being good for yourself means you have a certain level of strength. And to me that’s important. Like, so people don’t have you funny. When you soft people wanna step, and take foot on u.

Me: I think that’s maybe why people liked me ‘cause I didn't really let people take advantage of me when I first reach in D/a... on the ball field.
Saryta: Haha, that good, cause in D/a people does watch white man like they weak, you know. As if all of them soft.

The sweat presented a site for becoming ‘good for myself’ - through rhetorical football talk and ‘playing hard’. It offered some degree of recognition and ‘respect’, which spilt over into other village relations, disrupting stereotypes about my softness, which distance and an unwillingness to participate in the sweat would have left intact. Further, this expression of boldness also challenged my presumed respectability, making me less suspicious. Thus, the play-space of the savannah first instantiated then ambiguated the idea of my whiteness/foreignness, symbolically displacing it
through stereotypically black/Dominican practices. The sweat provided a rudimentary accommodation into village life; a site for behavioural border crossing and bringing into relation.

From here I came to realise that a fuller participation across various working and middle-class spheres of life demanded a performative versatility of self. An adaptability that would enable communication, connection and mutual human intelligibility – across markers of colour, class and origin that had, up to then, glaringly distinguished me as a privileged ‘other’. My priority intuitively became what I would later learn has been called ‘observant participation’ (Lassiter 2005), inverting the orthodox Euro-American method of participant observation, which typically seeks reified difference as epistemological object, and an ‘other’ as its subject. Instead ‘observant participation’ foregrounds the ‘observance’ of local practice and realities as its priority. By this I mean that prior to a concern with observation for knowledge’s sake alone, I was interested in social fluency; learning context appropriate comportment and expression.

Firstly, this implied accepting the futility of protesting my categorisation as ‘a white man’. I followed the advice of a friend and feminist activist who told me, ‘you know, those things ... you accept them for the way they are, change what you can... the rest, you move on’. Furthermore, I sought to adapt myself. Since whiteness signified a privileged foreignness to Dominicans and an existential foreignness to me, I set about behaviourally shedding discernible markers of this status. Similarly, pronounced symbols of metropolitan Caribbean self-definition (foods, music, UK carnivals and British-Caribbean Ebonics) also fell away. In turn, I mimetically merged many elements of local style into my dress, comportment and speech. Perhaps because people seemed to accept my appropriation of kweyol phrases and my ‘bounce’ (gait) as amusing, perhaps because absolutist conclusions on authenticity often splinter into fragments in the Caribbean (Walcott 1974; Glissant 1997), or maybe because of my upbringing in the UK negotiating white and black as a ‘halfie’ (Abu Lughod 1991), I grew into my Dominican self quite habitually.

I began (though unaware of it then) to adopt what Mulot (2008) has called ‘la compétence créole’: a performative social versatility which is embodied in, but far from exclusive to, the figure of the shabin. For Mulot the shabin represents the Caribbean tenacity to flexibly shift registers of expression along the colour-class continuum according to context and company. Therefore, coming to be variously identified as shabin, ‘mix’ (black and white) or ‘white’ as I moved through
the various spaces of my Dominican life (e.g. from the Pinard’s to ‘the block’), I would come to learn, often subconsciously, how to behave according to my ambiguously coloured status. When to present myself as a ‘white man’, and when to be a *shabin*; when to speak with the otherwise alienating sobriety of ‘official’ English and when to adopt creole syntax, tone and a sprinkling of *kwéyòl* vocabulary (reflecting the local mesolect, Yousuf 2014: 382). When to shake a hand and when to ‘knocks’ a fist; when to be silent and serious and when to tell a tall tale of adventure. But whilst this flexible disposition sounds, with the benefit of hindsight, like a straightforward and fluent performativity, it proved a clumsy, gradual, and incomplete undertaking. That said, it became a pragmatic means of negotiating a path through my island life – becoming ‘good for myself’ and feeling less alien. And as my intuitive stance of observant participation enabled this burgeoning creole competence, it must be added that my conversations with people and field notes were also richer and more grounded: I was entering closer mutual understanding and dialogue with my hosts. Though difference and inequality were not disregarded, they were starting to be worked through, traversed and understood. We were entering further into relation. Later, as my kinship relations were revealed to my hosts and I worked out a community role, so this sense of being in relation and place would also progress, as I shall demonstrate.

*Making Connections and Finding Vocations*

With time, I became an expected face on the savannah, both ‘sweating’ with the older fellas (ages 17-40s) and organising a team for the younger boys and girls of the village (ages 8-17). In this latter role of football coach, I responded to the demand amongst men in the community – many former players and now fathers—to return sporting esteem to a village which once boasted a national league side and local competitions. And on the part of many mothers - particularly worried about of their sons ‘indiscipline’, I was taken as a ‘role model’ who could instil some of the discipline presumed congenital to my British upbringing, by teaching their boys the rudiments of the game. Therefore, in this role as ‘Coach Adams’ (by which I was nicknamed) I found a compromise between the modicum of ‘respect’ I had earned on the football field and the ready association of my ascribed status with respectability, discipline, expert knowledge and their inculcation.
I stumbled into this community role without thought of its methodological possibilities, initially seeing coaching as a reciprocal contribution to lives others were sharing with me. But in hindsight I realise that this teacher-like persona led to many of the trusting friendships that produced this thesis. In this role I came to observe the lives of the boys and girls I coached: their gendered interactions, relations to siblings and parents, and their general perspectives on the world. I developed conversations with many of the men of the village, initially discussing local football histories, then work and family lives. And with the mothers of the youth conversations developed on mothering, fathers, child maintenance and conjugal relations. In sum, not only did playing football earn me a basic level of peer recognition, in coaching I found my vocation and position of compromise; a balanced persona from which other trusting relations could grow.

My first 5 months in Loubiere passed with a flash. October’s Independence celebrations gave way to Christmas, which was swiftly followed by the Carnival period (January-March). In this time friendships grew with those ‘whose spirit took mine’; that is, with whom an immediately mutual affinity developed. Suspicions eroded and we became an everyday presence in one-another’s lives. I would ‘check’ (visit) new friends and acquaintances, ‘pull up’ and chat by the road, or occasionally request a recorded (semi-structured, often spontaneously arranged) interview on a
veranda or in a yard. In this time, I became a village fixture, observantly absorbing and affecting the quotidian happenings of the community.

A particularly defining moment in the growth of these new connections was my new friends’ introduction to my mother and sister when they ‘came down’ for Christmas. Motherhood is sanctified across the region, with the mother-son relationship being identified as an especially fond one (‘you cannot tell me you don’t love the woman that carry you, that make you?!’, a father/son once insisted). So perhaps placing me through my mother further familiarised me to my hosts. Being able to see and identify me as someone’s son, presented a fundamental bond almost all of my ‘partners’ (friends) could relate to. And specifically, identifying my mother as a black woman (in this instance a gloss for ‘of Dominican origin’) intelligibly positioned me in a Dominican social nexus.

This intimate placing of me was combined with new friends commonly asking, ‘who that is your family Dom’nica?’, then proceeding to dyadically locate me using networks of known kin on the island (‘what [relation] is mista to you?’). They traced resemblances and genealogical linkages. One such conversation went,

Star: Philogene? That’s your family [in] Colihaut?... Yes my boy, you looking like them!

Albert: True!

Star: But you just white... But you see them black...Him together with them; you must see his face on their own.... De same long face my brother.

Julie: True. Right, right.

This form of interpersonal contextualisation, our relating by sharing and clarify knowledge of relations, as well as locating village sites of origin and belonging, also offered reciprocal revelation of our kinship worlds. Such basic sharing not only helped me get a lived sense of kinship understandings (dyadic mapping, genealogies), but also felt imperative in light of the personal details my friends had shared with me.

38Particularly significant, I believe, given the extent to which motherhood is celebrated in Dominica. Introducing someone to your mother signifies a valued relationship to that friend and opens the way for the friend to then engage the customary caring greeting, ‘how’s mammy’ when you meet them in public (fathers are rarely, if ever inquired about).
After six months, I moved to a ground-floor flat in a bayside house. My new landlords were a retired bus driver and domestic worker who spent their working lives in London and now, like many of their generation go ‘back and forth’ for healthcare and to see (grand)children. Although wealthy by local standards, they sustained a more active community presence than my previous landlords, employing various ‘young men’\(^{39}\) to clean the yard and ‘make message’ (run errands). Their adoptive adult daughter and live-in carer also acted as their bridge to community life. Their home, and my downstairs flat, was just a fence apart from the busy ‘Three Road Junction’ - a compromise between the privacy still expected for me, whilst granting greater freedom to come and go, invite guests and allow the now more proximate social world to permeate the fence.

By the time I arrived at this house I had worked out a daily routine featuring voluntary activities and social visits; many with a research dimension. In Dominica, few people know what social anthropologists do. Family, friends and acquaintances were encouraging of me as a young man of Dominican heritage doing my PhD - especially given the widespread support of education as a vector for social advancement in the region. Nevertheless, explaining to them that my job was to research and document how they lived their family lives – including the most mundane and taken for granted details— often caused confusion. Becoming a football coach, videographer, volunteer youth worker with a Baha’i group and a member of CariMAN (regional NGO working on ‘men’s issues’) presented intelligible community vocations that were of clear social value. These roles offered not only a personal sense of place, but of more pressing personal import the sense that I had sufficient stake in village affairs to ask delving questions, observe and document daily life. But projects did not always go to plan. People’s demands sometimes grew too big to manage (e.g. editing a friend’s music video with elaborate special effects); or they overwhelmed me, such as young players quarrelling instead of running drills I had spent the afternoon planning. During one football session, I grew frustrated and cursed. ‘Adam does curse, nuh?’ one girl asked as she stood stunned. Used to their parents’ routine cursing, yet unacquainted with ‘white’ fallibility, these moments seemed to puncture idealised images of me. But in these moments of lost composure, perhaps I became more human as I transgressed my ascribed propriety. Following the oft cited

\(^{39}\)Although between the ages of 35 and 70, it is common that middle class Dominicans refer to black men of humble education and societal status as such.
cliché that ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ - taken locally to mean ‘discipline a child’ – I perhaps also revealed a commitment to community and my role in it.

Methodologically, through voluntarism I tried to transcend the reductive concept of ‘rapport’ as necessary hurdle to ‘accessing’ social knowledge. Rather, my concern was a commitment to people and place through useful community service, underpinned by the assumption that a reciprocal equilibrium might be resolved between my voluntarism and the personal sharing of my hosts. I pursued this alongside the realities of friendship and kinship - gifting, sharing, advice, support and disagreements. In short, participation often wound up taking priority over ethnographic concerns with documentation, which although ever-present came second to my sense of social contribution. (In fact, I routinely fell asleep notebook on chest and chicken-scratch incomplete after a day’s volunteering).

Finally, I also spent considerable time ‘connecting’ with male kin: age-mate cousins from the Roseau Valley who I ‘limed’ with on weekends; Auntie’s quiet husband Gus, who I talked with about work, his animals and spearfishing; Christabel’s brother whose daughter resides by Auntie, he lived elsewhere but visited for lunch (like me) and took me out on weekend drives; and finally, there were many extended family members of my late grandfather who would share their memories of him and other familial histories when I would visit Colihaut. So although less actively involved in my daily life than my aunt and female cousin - who sought to ensure my safe residence, daily wellbeing and managed the home I visited most days - male kin laid an occasioned bridge to ‘outside’ spaces (yards, roadside ‘limes’, ancestral villages) and a model for how they approach kin relations; often in a hands-off, quiet, more autonomous and sporadic manner.

Showing a commitment to community, revealing my fallibility, presenting family relations to the island and to kin more generally, as well as developing ongoing friendships and family connections, all served to further familiarise me to my hosts. Six months into fieldwork an ethnographically rich working sense of emplacement had developed and I was further drawn into relation with people and place. Thus, by the time I shifted dwelling a third time, following another visit to the UK, I was convinced the transition would be smooth.
Terms of Accommodation

The Shack

October 2013, one year after arriving in Dominica. I had been staying with family in Colihaut for a month after returning from a summer in England and started travelling each day to Loubiere to fix up a dilapidated shack which I had convinced a friend and felon-turned-father, Scratchie, and his wife Cyrilla, to let me rent. I pitched my move to them on the grounds of it bringing a supplementary household income, and enabling me to better witness Scratchie’s unfolding life-journey (we had spoken extensively on his life throughout the past year). Following some deliberation on its level of disrepair and suitability, they accepted and the following day I started work, enlisting village repairman Joel.

Preceding my first overnight stay, cousin Christabel, who had heard much of ‘Adom’s shack’, insisted on ‘dropping me up’. Her thinly veiled intention was to véyé (watch, see) the place and assess its acceptability. Following a four-room tour of the creaky 7x7m structure and my excited plans to lay ‘carpet’ (linoleum), replace rusting galvinage (roofing) and sure up creaky floorboards, she turned to me and declared, ‘I hate it!... I just do not see how you can make it secure’, sceptically inspecting the plywood door. That night as I lay on a new foam mattress on the old bed, I received a barrage of texts from my mother in England. She had surely received Christabel’s inspection report. The first message – titled, "A Mother’s Pain and Anguish" - read,

This is exactly what I feared. Middle-class foolishness. I have made so much sacrifice. In raising my children; in an attempt to diffuse the legacy of poverty. And now this!!! I do not care that material things may get stolen. It is what might happen to human life in the process, that bothers me. This is selfish behaviour, and I for one will lose so much sleep whilst this unnecessary nonsense continues...

My female kin had reached a transatlantic consensus, condemning my new house on the basis of sanitary concerns and worries about my security.

The following morning, I visited my friends Ras Alby, Ras Julie and their nephew, Star, to reason through my situation. ‘There is not a place for you to be’, warned Star, a 38-year-old father of seven, ‘in dere is a hell-hole!’ As our discussion developed it became evident that his concerns related to Scratchie’s reputation as the village volé (‘teef’). ‘Don’t show people what you ave!’, he
warned. Now addressing me through his uncles he added, ‘Next minute he come down crying: “Star boy, Julie boy, I not seeing my ting... I not seeing my dis, I not seeing my dat”’. Then his uncle Julie coolly interjected,

I doh bring him all dere. I jus realise, de man show me “look, is so I get a house” ... is not like I doh know about dem man history...I myself doh agree [for him to be there] ... All I see, Adam want is an experiment and an experience within that trench. I know he not go' stay dere. [Addressing me] So my boy you go ahead, follow dat trench. Write it do’n. Make a documentary.

Accepting his uncle’s rationalisation Star issued a final warning,

Star: You hear what I tell you. Your boy talk to you, you know. Jus open your eyes and see what I saying, my boy.

Julie: Mista have a aura dat can deal wi dat!

Star: I know his head strong you know Julie, I know his head strong...

Julie: You have a current dat can deal with dat. Just go ahead and do what you have to do ... You is man dey could take and put you right there [he gathers some twigs and dry leaves on the yard floor, assembling a makeshift nest]. And you will make a house wiv dem same leaf,

Figure 8 View of ‘The Shack’ from Scratchie and Angeline’s house
for you to live. I know you is man like dat. Yeah, I not frighten. You is man dat can live in big skyscraper, and you is man dat could com do’n and live how you livin. So I doh have problem wiv dat. Jus as we say, you have to be wise.

‘I hate it’; ‘This is exactly what I feared’; ‘There is not a place for you to be’. These sentiments echoed through my thoughts on the short walk back to the shack that Sunday morning. They suggested a sudden closure, that I had reached a limit-point of closeness between myself and my hosts. That for all our convivial roadside interactions, personal conversations on verandas and my visible commitment to community, any hope of crossing class-bound living spaces and entering Scratchie’s domestic life was a step too far. An ethnographer’s egalitarian romanticism; ‘middle-class foolishness’! Yet, the issue was not whether I might conceivably enter the domestic lives of my new landlords, but what exposure to theft, sanitary risk and conflict this traversal of naturalised class distance might entail. Thus, perhaps I had encountered the other side of the neighbourly intimacies I was seeking - the tensions and distrust that pattern interpersonal village relations and histories (Wilson 1973; Cohen 1955). Finding myself between these fractures I came to see how my friends had come to view me after a year in their lives. I came to see the play between my privilege, still making me inescapably vulnerable to advantageous others; and their faith in my adaptable spirit (‘current’, ‘aura’, ‘head’), enabling a potential transition from hypothetical skyscraper to makeshift dwelling, big white house to a shack, possible. And yet, for Julie this transition was taken to be just a temporary ethnographic relocation (‘experiment’) - indeed, it had to be to conceive of such semantically disparate categories of person sharing a living space. Nonetheless, as this proximity became a daily reality, my hosts found insightful and witty ways to semantically accommodate me.

‘Mentality’, Colour and Mutuality

In this final section I conclude this journey between dwellings and into place by discussing the terms of address my hosts resolved to accommodate the social self I had become; the self I had ‘made’. From October 2013 to the end of fieldwork (April 2014) I became part of the daily life of Scratchie and Cyrilla’s family yard. In this time, none of my family or friend’s fears came to fruition. However, I did share in many of my landlords’ life-moments: birthdays, Christmas, the birth of their grandson and the death of Scratchie’s beloved dog. I observed his attentive fathering; and I also assisted him in his yard – the province of male domestic labour. And it is through this
mundane act of labouring, doing yard work under the hot Caribbean sun (sweeping, fixing fences, weeding, laying concrete) that a sense of mutuality was apparent between us.

On National Community Day of Service 201440 Scratchie and I spent the morning cleaning his yard. Afterwards Cyrilla prepared a breakfast of codfish, scrambled eggs, salad, guava juice and a mastiff bread. As I bounded up the concrete steps between our houses following her call to eat, I noticed she was watching my dirtied shorts and sweaty T-shirt. ‘Is your sister black like you?’ she inquired. My sister was the topic of conversation the previous day when I mentioned she was soon to visit Dominica. Still, her question surprised me. Up to then I had been called ‘white’, ‘mix’, ‘high colour’, ‘red man’ or shabin, but very rarely (and only by Dominicans who had lived in ‘white countries’) was I ‘black’. I explained that although we are both ‘mix’, my sister has features that often cause others to take her for black. Interjecting, Cyrilla asserted, ‘colour is nuffing you know!’, throwing me off my complicated answer; before adding,
It’s your mentality, your mentality is black... most people your complexion would not so much associate with lower-class people. But since you meet Scratchie and us, it’s like you make yourself with us.

Cyrilla’s comments suggested that my enthusiasm for physical labour, stereotypically denoted ‘black man’s work’, was taken as emblematic of my general attitude (my ‘mentality’) towards them and their way of life. Similarly, my willingness to participate in their family and feel at home (‘make myself’ and ‘associate’) with them was semantically out of skip with my lofty ‘coloured’ status. Syd Mintz wrote of Caribbean societies that, ‘perception of colour is not simply a matter of observed phenotype but of observed phenotype taken together with many other factors’ (1957: 153). In this case Cyrilla’s re-colouring of me according to my ‘mentality’ was to extend Mintz’s argument by taking ‘such factors’ not only to inform, but to significantly shift phenotypic perceptions.

Another case further illustrates this point. In early 2014 I accompanied Scratchie to share his story at the state prison. I videoed his speech, where he told his redemptive life’s-tale to inspire inmates towards ‘de right path’. At one point, pausing his energetic oration, he declared, ‘I proud to be black, I doh know about all you?!’ Then he gestured to me,

And Mista ah tell you that! He’s a black man you know! Doh watch him-, watch his meditation. That is jus a white-, he’s a black man with a clear, clear- [raised his hand], high high pigmentation, you understand. But he’s a Dominican wiv all you. Doh believe he is an English boy. All his race, all his roots, everybody is D/a you understand. ColIHaut, Roseau, Gran Bay. All about he ave people. Philogene is all his family.

It seems that the positive mutual terms of our friendship, his recognition of my ‘meditation’\(^{41}\) and his knowledge of my kinship connection to the island, together led Scratchie to re-perceive my colour to his audience in an act of public accommodation. Declaring me a black man, re-signifying my colour through my attitude and relation to Dominica, therefore rendered me referentially familiar and intelligible on local terms. In a sense, whilst I had taken on the role, as ethnographer, of translating and sharing his story to the world ‘up dere’ (‘Englan’ and beyond),

\(^{41}\) What his wife calls ‘mentality’ above, what Deirdre Rose’s Dominican informants call ‘consciousness’ (2009b) or what an aunt of mine calls, being ‘a roots man’ – i.e. humble and socially aware.
Scratchie had taken it upon himself to translate me to his Dominican audience, denoting me ostensibly black and thus Dominican (‘wiv all you’).

Scratchie’s shorthand placing of me, a convention repeated by many friends during introductions, served as a suspicion-diffusing technique to quickly make sense of and position my ambiguous otherness. His brief biography also offered an individuated location from which I might assert personality, a place from which to socially be, act and speak. This is particularly important in The Antilles, where asserting personality is the process through which persons become, through which they ‘make themselves’. And much of one’s personality is bestowed in the nicknames people are given.

**Conclusion: Nicknaming as Social Emplacement**

The Masses. They will tell you who you are with a nickname.

Anthony Winkler (2004: 74)

Adom jus come there and make himself in Dominica, wii! Is swear you would say you was born Dominica. You came as a white man and now you leaving a black man with a clear complexion

Carol, friend and mother of two, Loubiere.

To ‘make oneself’ is to become at home in a given place. It is the process through which an individual establishes a persona, presents themselves to the social world and sets themselves apart as a being in that world. Whilst the term has agentive connotations, it is a process of dialogue; of asserting, receiving, and negotiating a persona from within and without. Dominicans possess an acute capacity to discern a familiar face from one that ‘jus come out de foreign’. Therefore, to make one’s self, is the process of establishing a social self, of becoming locally ‘known’ (recognisable). Through the establishment of friendships, voluntary community vocations, the elucidation of kinship connections and the adaptation of behavioural style - in short, my deep participation in village and island life – I have demonstrated how I developed a social personality in Dominica. That is, how I was ‘made’ and ‘made myself’ on local terms.

Carol’s comments are typical of the ways in which friends and family would amusedly remark upon discernible aspects of this self-making transformation - such as my gait (‘see de boy bounce, like a real Dom’nican, wii!’) or appropriation of kweyol (‘whay papa, you talking more Dom’nican than me, man!’). The ambiguated descriptor ‘a black man with a clear complexion’ encapsulates
this shift from being socially white and indexably foreign, to becoming practically or honorifically black and thus homed. As Manning (1974) and Burton (1999) have highlighted, Caribbean folk have a penchant for naming things (humans, boats, vehicles) in comically creative and bluntly descriptive ways (e.g. a Loubiere man with exceptionally long eyelashes is called ‘Sexy Eyes’). However, often ‘things are never so serious as when they are in jest’ (Burton 1999), hence names also reveal much of how a person is perceived. A final example illuminates this point.

‘Da White Man’! My neighbour Sharon shouted from the darkness behind her jalousie shutters, as I passed her house on the corner of Backstreet towards the shack. ‘Dats’ right, not any white man, “the White man”’, I called back in a comically boastful manner. By now I had resigned to accept the ‘white man’ title, but the singularity of her nickname amused me. Her door swung open, ‘no no, not “THE” white man’, she playfully scolded, mimicking my over-enunciation of the ‘The’. ‘It’s da white man’, she corrected, slowly stressing the ‘da’, before chuckling.

Our brief exchange and the nickname she coined and continued using, encompasses much of the ambiguity of my eventual status to my hosts. My use of ‘the’ and their enduring identification of me as ‘white’ indicated a continued perception of my being of elsewhere – foreign and inherently privileged. Yet, the inflection of ‘da also’ placed me in idiosyncratic and local terms. ‘The white man’ would have connoted a metropolitan whiteness, but this was re-oriented by Sharon’s emphatic ‘da’ towards the periphery, towards the Dominica to which I had ‘centred’ myself (Baker 1994). Since nicknames are ‘symbolic individuators’ often borrowed to confer mock heroic status (Burton 1999: 48-9) the powerful title of ‘De White Man’ referred to a symbolic locus of inherent power in the Caribbean imaginary – white maleness. But, in the same stroke it re-inflected that power by linguistically rendering it ‘off-white’. Therefore, much as Kahn describes the ambiguously ‘Spanish’ category in Trinidad, Sharon’s title ‘both reveals and negotiates the extant system of social stratification and power relations on which it rests’ (Kahn 2010: 61). In other words, her nickname gestured towards both an undeniable bodily privilege and my individual attempt to rework and allay that privilege through participation. Therefore, in her onomastic play Sharon had reconciled a place of being for me within this shared local world. She had afforded me, structurally and symbolically, a place to be on local terms. Our differences would not disappear, but they could be worked out in quotidian ways, starting with comical descriptors. Whether I liked it or not, to her and others I was now ‘de white man’ or ‘a black man with a clear complexion’ - along with all the contradictions and history these ludically laden nicknames ascribed.
Here this ethnographic and diasporic journey into place closes. This journey has depicted a process of social becoming in which I was made and ‘made myself’. Or one could say that I became *incompletely creole via* attentive participation: community contribution, revelation of self/kin, behavioural learning and ambiguation of self. This enabled deep dialogue between seemingly disparate selves/others, and thus, a bringing into *relation* – the existential and methodological foundation of this thesis. I have endeavoured to reveal in this dialogue a sense of both my participation in quotidian Dominican life and my hosts’ observation of this – an ethnographic self as other, personified under the gaze of his hosts. The ethnographic depictions of lives, experiences and relationships that follow are testament to this unfolding conversation between different yet mutual selves.
Chapter 2. The *Gwopwel* as Conjugal Crisis and Patriarchal Paradox:

From ‘Falling’ to ‘Growing’ in Love

*Figure 10 - The Gwopwel*

Prologue: A Suicide in Newtown

As Newtown, a low-income Roseau suburb, awoke to a new morning in May 2013, the body of a young man was found hanging in his father’s home. News of the suicide shocked the community and murmured through the small island. Speaking to reporters, a neighbour noted the deceased had been behaving ‘strangely’ the previous night,

He was by me... in the bar, and a couple of my partners ...After a while I told them I going and sleep. I find it was funny ... because he came there for five hours and he never spoke, he never said a word...Next thing, my girlfriend mother knocking de door *bom bom bom*, “you doh hear [name omitted] hang himself over there?” One time I fly up de road I watch de vibes I see them putting him in a ting [body bag] (Dominica News Online, 2013).
Bef (gossip) travels quickly in Dominica. The tragic tale was the first thing to meet me as I left my gate and greeted local gamin, Booga, and fisherman, Pampo, on the bus stop. ‘You hear a partner kill his self for a woman Newto’n?!, Booga informed. He detailed the story, then concluded, ‘Mista must not love life, man!’ Next, I saw Stephan. I asked if he had heard what happened. He nodded with a nonchalant, ‘yah’. ‘It’s sad, eh’, I commented. ‘But how you can kill yourself for woman, nuh?!’ he exclaimed, then quipped, ‘I’d hang her instead!’ He chuckled and sauntered on.

By lunch at Auntie’s the tale had an enchanted tone. A teenage cousin had heard the bef on the school bus. ‘They say the man charmé [bewitched by love magic] so the man get a gwopwel [heartbreak]. They say a woman put red beans in the man kako [cacao] tea so you won’t know what she put in there!’, she reported with a bright smile. Apparently, he had died from a gwopwel, or ‘GP’, as people abbreviate it locally - ‘the love sickness’. This severe heartbreak was apparently brought about when his girlfriend (who had bewitched him by feeding him her menses concealed in chocolate tea) had left him. The intense desire of the elixir led him to take his life when she terminated the relationship.
Yet, Joel - my landlord’s repair man and reported gwopwel/survivor - denied magic was at play. He proposed that madness caused the suicide, echoing the grieving mother’s statement (above),

He fall in love with a girl, and... it didn’t have no other person... he wanted to be with than her. But he got some disappointing news so that maybe blow off his mind (DAVibes Online News, 23\textsuperscript{rd} May 2013).

She believed her son’s suicidal insanity (‘blown off mind’) came in response to his ‘GP’; whilst Joel believed, he ‘is man dat mad already... A normal man cyaa do dat!’, adamant that such an effacement of ‘normal’ male behaviour could only result from pre-existing psychosis.

In the following days comments from neighbours, friends and former schoolmates, in Dominica and abroad, filled online news comment boards. They expressed sympathy, pity and condemnation at his termination of ‘God-given-life’; and concern that he let love, or more specifically a woman, lead him to death. In this latter vein a man commented,

He may have a gwopwel... it’s sad he took his life, but you see some Dominican women they want too much material things from a man and not love and affection... Come on, satisfy with the little the man have to offer and one day God will bless all u! (Dominica News Online, 23\textsuperscript{rd} May 2013).

The commenter believed since he could not ‘provide’ for her she had left him, which in turn precipitated his ‘GP’ and suicide. Supposedly, she had ‘broken his heart and broken his hand\textsuperscript{42} as the saying goes; deserted and bankrupted him, leading him to suicide.

Introduction

Love draws the lover out of [her/]himself and makes [her/]him dwell in the beloved ...Thus the soul is more truly where it loves than where it lives

Albert the Great (Cowburn 2003: 126)

This tragedy was my first encounter with the gwopwel, the complex affliction that forms the focus of this chapter. I opened with this polyvocal story for it gives a sense of how the phenomenon was revealed through everyday conversation and networks of bef. I quickly learned that the ‘GP’ was

\textsuperscript{42} See chapter 4 for a detailed discussion on the poetic relationship between hands and provision
more than just a heartbreak, it functions as a popular social vehicle for animating everyday debates about heterosexual love, desire, conjugality and gender. Furthermore, I cite this example for despite its drastic content\textsuperscript{43} it shares core characteristics with many ‘GP’ stories I heard during fieldwork: (1) it involved the extreme behaviour (possessiveness, violence, suicide) of a young man in response to unrequited or lost love; (2) it featured common local responses: sympathy with his torrid yet familiar fate; sardonic humour at the absurdity of allowing something so fickle as love to ‘carry him away’; and finally, (3) it included explanatory appeals to bewitchment and madness as a means of comprehending such anti-normative male behaviour.

With these core features in mind, in what follows I examine the gwopwe/ through the prism of gender, asking what its expression by men reveals of masculine personhood\textsuperscript{44} in Dominica. Interlocutors, male and female alike, insisted that Dominican men suffer, or rather, indulge the affliction far worse than women. I ask why this is; examining the ‘GP’ through the narratives of men and women as a masculine personal crisis that is particularly pronounced for working-class men.

For these men I contend that the ‘GP’ exposes a dissonance between the patriarchal order of Dominican conjugal relations and their precarious \textit{de facto} position within them. This I term the \textit{patriarchy-vulnerability paradox}: In Dominica men’s normative conjugal role entails economic ‘maintenance’ and with it, sexual control of a female partner. Provision and control are tied to male emotional investment. Yet, in lived-reality men’s limited resources and women’s realisation of sexual freedoms render working-class men vulnerable in conjugal matters. Hence the patriarchy-vulnerability predicament.

Men’s complete investment of emotional-self and scant resources in a single female brings great risk to the male person and his pride. Such risk becomes crisis when the alchemy of love throws patriarchal normativity into disarray, subverting a man’s position from authoritative provider to emotional dependent. I argue that the ‘GP’ offers a pressure valve for masculine affective

\textsuperscript{43} Suicides are rare and mark the memories of ‘god-fearing’ islanders. A friend and counsellor in his late forties commented on this case, saying he could recall just two previous suicides in his living memory. Deaths from murder, health conditions, road accidents, at sea or from natural disasters (hurricanes, landslides) are far more common.

\textsuperscript{44} Throughout ‘personhood’ refers to the making, becoming and recognition of a person, a human social self.
vulnerability; the affordance of a sudden, temporary and acknowledged outpouring of emotional pain or ‘mourning’. However, this has limits, overindulgence provokes ridicule from friends and neighbours, and in excess, as a perversion of masculine ideals, demands supernatural explanation.

In what follows, I first, lay out a brief anatomy of the ‘GP’ - its etymology, usage, symptoms and why it is funny. Second, I situate the ‘GP’ in its Dominican conjugal context of mutual distrust, economically infused relations and their expected impermanence. Third, I bring out the patriarchal paradox of the ‘GP’ in three moments: (a) through the prevention of ‘GP’ vulnerability, i.e. makoness (sissyness); (b) through masculinitist tales of love magic that Dominicans employ to semantically deal with the paradox; and (c) through the indifferent attitude to love that men assume as they learn from the ‘GP’. Finally, I conclude by asking: given the conjugal antagonism and ideology of replaceability that the ‘GP’ incites, how do so many Dominicans settle into enduring later-life unions? In closing, I examine the conjugal compromises couples resolve when tensions find stable equilibria and they begin to ‘grow in love’.

Concerning method, I examine discourses drawn from semi-structured interviews and informal conversation with men and women of various ages, as well as social media and calypsos. I often only glimpsed the ‘GP’, as such this is not an ethnographic rendering of observed ‘GP’s, but the product of retellings, personal memories and their invoked affects. It is a discussion of what it discursively does; what its reveals about gender. As ethnographer then, I suggest the ‘GP’ as an animator of people's gendered social models, their 'figments of thought' (Leach 1954). That is, how Dominicans theorise masculine, feminine, and the politics/play between them, via the gwopwel. From these individual models, I attempt to arrange an analytic overview, a general sketch of the male conjugal life course, in the context of masculine personhood.

I did not experience a ‘GP’ in Dominica (figuratively, for kin/friends/the island after my departure, perhaps, but not in literal romantic terms). However, as a single young man I was given copious advice on how to avoid one. This was mostly from men and some female friends, who warned of avoiding the ‘tricksy’ (cunning) ways of ‘woman’. Similarly, undoubtedly aware of such narratives, women proffered their own mocking take on men’s ‘GP’ sufferings and sexual double standards. Therefore, our discussions occurred not in abstraction, but aligned to my interlocutors’ gendered preoccupations and agendas; these included informing me of ‘GP’ matters for my own practical
benefit or simply telling me how they perceived things to be (‘...is so it is Dom’nica’). These also often stimulated quarrels between male and female, elder and younger standpoints.

In kinship lifecourse terms, this chapter traces the fraught romantic and sexual relations that foreground the parental frictions that infuse the thesis (see chapter 4). It tracks men’s conjugal ‘tying’ into kinship throughout their life trajectories. But rather than being tied to children via naming (chapter 3) or state intervention (chapter 4), men are tied to women by uncontrolled affect, love magic and later, voluntarily when they elect to settle down and ‘grow in love’. Yet, the ‘GP’s patriarchy-vulnerability complex inserts early turmoil into this straightforward sequence; jamming any uncomplicated route to conjugal commitment. It reminds men of the uncertainty of being tied, promotes cool conjugal indifference and aggravates distrust. Hence, this chapter brings some conjugal context to the thesis as a whole, revealing tensions that endure into parental relations; informing the ‘naming’ of fathers (see chapter 3) and the frictions that frame paternal provision (chapter 5). Furthermore, the moment when men settle into longer term relations also offers a conjugal context for men’s journeys into respectability (chapter 6) and grandfatherhood (chapter 7).

An Anatomy of the Gwopwel

Etymologies and The Gwopwel’s Play

The ‘GP’ is trans-Caribbean: in Trinidad, it is termed the tabanka; in Guyana, typee (Robinson 1983); and in Guadeloupe, lenbé, or gwopwel; it is also gwopwel throughout the francophone Antilles - Martinique, Haiti, St Lucia, St Martin and Dominica. To locate its single etymology is to assign an onerous task. This is ‘because kweyol is a funny language’ as the daughter of a cultural activist once concluded. It translates awkwardly, its meanings are conveyed in speech only (rather than rule-governed writing). Hence, it retains a semantic openness and broad pliability by the speaker. Case in point: Gwo unambiguously means big; whilst pwel can refer to animal fur, human bodily hair or, more commonly, pubic hair. The etymologies I was told also precluded any decisive root.

For example, when I asked kweyol radio host Kaywana, what ‘big hairs’ have to do with heartbreaks, her explanation was humorous,
Kaywana: Well, when you are broken hearted you don’t take care of yourself. So you don’t groom where needs to be groomed …you don’t eat, sleep etcetera.

Adom: … but that assumes you shave there, right?

Kaywana: … [laughing] well even if you don’t shave but the heartache gives rise to faster or more growth.

Confused though tickled by this ‘big pubic hair’ definition, I also asked a male cousin, Bwiggaz, who replied:

Bwiggaz: …Because your pwell gets big, man.

Adom: But why does it get big, I don’t understand?

Bwiggaz: It gets big, it just swells … it’s like you forget you living … days pass and months pass … you don’t take care of yourself. Like all now it’s 2013. Woosh! Its 2017, 4 years passing on you just like that!

Yet, Lysha, a security guard in his early thirties offered an entirely different explanation again,

Adom: So how did the gwopwel really get its name? “Gwo-, pwel”, that’s meaning big hair, no true?

Lysha: It’s a big ingrowing hair, so it’s a big problem! It’s difficult to pull out!

Other than illustrating the futility of pursuing singular origins for the term45, these diverse and creative etymologies also evoked the embodied symptomatology of the ‘GP’. For Bwiggas and Kaywana, the self-neglect and loss of temporal awareness of the gwopwel results in ungroomed/overgrown bodily hair. For Lysha, the word stands as follicular metaphor for the ‘GP’s pain and intractability.

The pliability of the term also extends to its figurative use. In addition to heartbreak, ‘GP’ also refers to yearning, for any departed loved-one, object, place or moment. The term is playfully used in a ‘tek bad things mek laugh’ style (Palmer-Adisa in Caldararo 2008:3), through which West

45 A truism for hermeneutic enquiry in the Antilles more generally. Littlewood (1993: 266) notes of Trinidad’s Tabanka, ‘the etymology is obscure and probably multiple’. He offers anything from a French Kweyol origin in ta banc, meaning ‘beached’ to a Central American Spanish origin in tabanco, a room ‘for stranded cocks’.

61
Indians draw humour from pain\textsuperscript{46}. For example, a young woman said of her soon to emigrate best friend, ‘I want to leave before her so I wouldn’t feel the \textit{gwopwel}/too much!’\textsuperscript{46}. Similarly, when the revelry of Carnival is over people speak of the ‘carnival \textit{gwopwel}/’ as they lament the season’s passing\textsuperscript{47}.

Similarly, themes of loss, pain and death frequently overlap in the use of the term. This is shown in the way the ‘GP’s symptomatology is locally dubbed, ‘mourning’; and, grieving a loved one may also be referenced through the heartache of a \textit{gwopwel}. As Scratchie once revealed, ‘I never get a \textit{gwopwel}, never!... [But] if you see my mudda die before me? Maybe I’ll get one’. Therefore, these examples show the term’s diverse application as a signifier of loss; referring back to the intensity, humour and pervasiveness of lovesickness; and drawing rhetorical power from their association with death’s disjunctures. Furthermore, these uses also throw up an ideological distinction between love-objects a person should mourn - a mother, other consanguines or friends - and those they should not because of their apparent replaceability - i.e. a conjugal partner. The ‘GP’ may be invoked playfully or sincerely to refer to an understandable form of loss; but in its central use it refers to a ludicrous form of mourning that should be avoided, as I show below. But first, an elaboration on what the ‘GP’ experientially is.

\textit{Defining the Problem: Symptoms, Categorisations and Why Men ‘Mourn’ More}

Although I have discussed the central features of the \textit{gwopwel} (as an intractable, embodied affliction that can result in self-neglect, suicide and madness), at this juncture it is possible to offer a more detailed outline of its expression. Joel shared a succinct symptomatology,

\begin{quote}
Now, a \textit{gwopwel} is wen ya girl fren leave you. You cannot eat! Ya get slim thinking about de girl. You don’t want to be by your fren. You’re by yourself. Some man doesn’t bathe! Some man doesn’t eat! .... Some man doesn’t want to see\textsuperscript{48} deir moda [mother]. Deir fren
\end{quote}

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{46} See too Wardle’s discussion of the ‘ludic’ in West Indian sociality (2000: 103); Cornell West’s discussion of ‘the tragic-comic disposition’ of African Americans (2009: 167).

\textsuperscript{47} Dominica even has a symbolic death-rite known as \textit{Tewe Vaval}, ‘carnival burial’ in the north eastern Kalinago territory. Here a coffin is burnt or buried, signifying the death of the spirit of carnival until its resurrection the following year.

\textsuperscript{48} To ‘not want to see’ is to get angry at the sight of.
talkin to dem, dey cursin deir fren. Dey like a mad man! Some man does jus stay at deir home an cry.

Although his emphasis, like most men and women I spoke with, is on the man's 'GP' experience (a point I return to) his symptomatology reflects those reported by all. Littlewood (1985; 1993), writing on Trinidad's tabanka calls these a/effects an ‘indigenous conceptualisation of reactive depression’; adding, that such ‘vegetative symptoms’ are known locally as ‘grinding’ (the analogue of ‘mourning’), which involves ‘wandering around or remaining at home alone’, loss of social interest, anger, insomnia and anorexia (1985: 277). Furthermore, he adds an embodied dimension, noting stomach contractions, ‘heavy heart’ and lethargy. Echoing this, Ryta (quoted above) described her experience in corporeal terms,

Sometimes you feeling it physically. I does feel weak. My chest, it does literally feel like my heart break. I know now, I take it, I take my pain! … [turns to me with a smile] I don’t think you’d be able to take it, na49 … Boy, that not easy!! I’ve been there, I wanted to die already; how much times I wish death on myself!

Others have even gone so far as to describe their suffering as lagonée, ‘when you in pain... on the verge of dying’, as Auntie translated it. Hence, not only can unrequited investment in another lead to physical pain so severe that the lover considers suicide, the trauma of the ‘GP’ has also been likened to the prospective agony of death itself.

Whilst such emphatic descriptions set the ‘GP’ apart in phenomenological terms, friends would often temper my inquisitive questions by insisting that the ‘GP’ is ‘no special ting’. Reminding me that gwopwel merely means heartbreak - a presumed universal - a friend quizzed, ‘so all you doh have that up in Englan, then?!’ Taking his insinuation that the ‘GP’ is not exotic but mundane; and rather than regard it as a culture-bound curiosity, I prefer to see it as a common human experience in vernacular form. As Joel highlights,

Don’t matter if you in Europe [or] in America in your ting, gwopwel is gwopwel! ... why you think American man jus shoot dere woman? Is a gwopwel dat dere! We jus give it dat name in de Caribbean [for] de madness a man will do. Some man doesn’t bathe, they doesn’t brush deir teeth, they doesn’t want to eat food. Dat is what Caribbean man does

49 Gesturing towards the lack of hardiness associated with my ‘Englishness’ upbringing.
do. American man cannot take dat. For dem to feel better dey jus kill de woman... It’s de
same but it’s a different form of handling it.

In short, the ‘GP’s peculiarity is its reflexively Antillean response to a common human experience.
This was a point friends impressed by drawing cosmopolitan references to famous fictional ‘GP’s
like King Kong or Romeo and Juliet (one man termed the latter, ‘de biggest ‘GP’ in history!’).

‘GP’s come in various intensities and periodicities. As Lysha elaborated,

‘GP’ coming in a category of many different fings, I cannot tell you how many stages you
going move through: ... obsession, jealousy, hate, grudge, love – head-over-heals -
hanging your heart in your hands-. My broda you have to go through all dem tings50.

The attachment to an unrequited love object can provoke several emotional responses in the
course of a ‘GP’. In terms of duration, Ratty (a Loubiere father-of-two) noted that ‘It ave some dat
it’s just a flash, wiv you for 2 weeks and then [gone]. And it ave some man, dat linger on until
when maybe they go mad. Never get over de woman’. Indeed, Elima, a shop owner from
Loubiere once met a man whose ‘GP’ ‘lingered’ considerably longer, as she comically reported on
Facebook,

I NEVER KNOW GWO PWEL WAS LASTIN SO LONG. A MAN CAME IN THE SHOP HE SAY
19 YEARS HE HAVE A GWO PWEL. LMAO THAT ONE IS MADDNESS WEE... AM LOOKIN
AT THE MAN TO SEE HIS FACE WHEN HE SAYING THAT U CAN SEE ALL THE SORROW
IN HIS EYE [as written].

Thus, how hard the sufferer ‘takes’ their gwopwel/informs its duration, as my neighbour Sharon
attested,

depending how you [are] wiv that person... it’s like years go by and you still in trance that
you not waking up from because you were always into that person and everything your
memory comes back to [is] just that person.

In any village one can hear biographic backstories of soulards (drunks) and ‘paros’ ('paro-noid'
crack fiends/’vagrants’) who were struck by a severe ‘GP’ and never recovered. However, the

50 Indeed, Beyoncé’s 2016 album Lemonade is a visual depiction of similar such stages of romantic grief
from a female African-American vantage.
average ‘GP’ is not so extreme. Rather, the GP’s ubiquity comes from the fact that most adults have personal experience of the gwopwel! As Ryta attested, ‘GP? Yah boy! Dat inevitable. In life, you will always meet that somebody. That person will take up all your senses. [And] like, if you lose that somebody, fuck!’ Lysha echoed this point: ‘If you believe it won’t happen to you, it happening to every man and every woman, teenager, no matter who, it happening to them!’ Hence, there is some consensus on the ‘GP’s inevitability and varied intensity. However, Sharon, Lysha’s sister added, ‘it goes both way. But you don’t get it that easily from the male … You’ll mainly get it from the woman to the man’. Both men and women repeated the claim that men languish the ‘GP’ more visibly than women; arguing that this is because women have greater access to the ‘cure’, a replacement. Then Lysha’s girlfriend boldly pitched in, ‘If a man have to give me gwopwel, I going for another man, one-time!’ Ryta later echoed this as a form of common sense, adding, ‘people does say the best way to get over a man is to lie down under a next man, eh’. Hence, the ideology of conjugal replaceability (which I elaborate below) posits that women can readily offset a ‘GP’ by finding a new partner, whereas men take longer to ‘ketch onto something new’.

Notwithstanding this, I am inclined to see that there is also a gendered performativity to the ‘GP’. As the Dominican director of a children’s NGO noted,

I think it’s just the society looking at how the men handle it rather than it affecting men more than women. So women deal with those things all the time – they have to express emotion, whatever. But if a man have to be doing that, [everyone] need to know about it! [she chuckles] … everyone is excited about it, you know.

So according to her observations, both feel the ‘GP’ but men’s ‘GP’s appear more pronounced because they are so dramatically moved from their expected demeanour. Conversely, women are normatively those who ‘bear their pain’ in kinship matters; from childbirth, to men’s infidelity, to the gwayé (struggles) of single-motherhood. Women express such quotidian pains as they toil through daily routines (asking God for help, scolding misbehaving children or speaking ill of absconding fathers); or in emotional ruptures when they ‘embarrass’ (confront) ‘wortless’ men in public and ‘make noise’ (quarrel) with them at home. These, are outlets of emotion for women’s conjugal frustrations. Men, by contrast, typically conceal day-to-day frustrations in the depths of their interiority (as I explore in chapter 5 regarding childcare), avoiding emotionally trying situations and burying troubles behind a cool posture of male strength. Therefore, when the
emotional disjuncture of the 'GP' causes this pose to rupture, the outcome is hyper-visible. It is the counter-normative performativity of the male 'GP', its dramatic intensity that makes it so funny.

Conjugal Distrust, Economics and the Humorous 'GP'

In everyday parlance Dominicans use many idioms to model various forms of conjugal, romantic and sexual relationship. These can be posited on a working continuum between temporary/casual and stable/committed relations, each with varied living and economic arrangements. Typically, with maturity, class status and ageing shifts from ‘transient’ to ‘transcendent’ orientations (Miller 1994) relationships progress from the ‘quick pass around’ (fleeting sexual encounter), to church sanctioned matrimony (see diagram below).

![Figure 12 - Working scheme of Dominican conjugal idioms](image)
The types delineated in this working scheme are based on people’s ideal-type cognitive models. In lived reality they are not bounded but overlap with one another and have some gender non-normative dimensions which are deemed unproblematic (e.g. a woman ‘maintaining’ a man she is ‘loving’). Furthermore, although posited in relation to dominant hierarchical ideals (i.e. church marriage at the apex), we should not see them as rungs on a ladder up which people inevitably progress on their conjugal lifecourse (though many follow this course). Instead, this general scheme tentatively maps the conjugal forms Dominicans speak of and recognise as having available to them.

Scholars of Caribbean kinship and gender have noted the atmosphere of mutual distrust that permeates heterosexual relations in the region (Senior 1991: 167-70; Rodman 1971; Wilson 1973). In Dominica I encountered polarised discourses caricaturing men as sexual exploiters and promiscuous ‘womanisers’; versus women as materialistic and ‘tricksy’ deceivers. These attitudes are informed by the widely documented double standard of sexual morality that often patterns Caribbean conjugal relations (Wilson 1969: 71; Clarke 1957: 81; Davenport 1961: 426; Otterbein 1966a: 67; R T Smith 1956: 144; M G Smith 1962; and Horowitz 1967: 64-5). Within this patriarchal order a man may discreetly entertain outside relations whilst he expects ‘his’ woman, to retain her fidelity; giving him the ‘respect’ his material provision ideologically demands. Distrust therefore emerges from her suspicion or knowledge of his outside relations; and his anxieties that she might clandestinely activate her own sexual freedoms whilst continuing to receive his provision.

In this conjugal context material provision is deeply bound to masculine personhood. Whether a schoolboy giving phone ‘top-up’ to a girlfriend (a recent trend friends found amusing); a working young man giving ‘his’ woman bus fare to attend college; or a husband’s investments in a family home, the imperative to provide is key to Dominican men’s sense of purpose in conjugal and kinship matters. Furthermore, when Dominicans speak of a man ‘caring’ (for a lover/child/sibling/mother) this is usually a reference to his material provision; along with the inalienable labour, sacrifice and recognition it implies (see chapter 5). Thus, romantic love and ‘maintenance’ are intimately bound, the latter taken as an expression of the former, and positioned in reciprocal mutuality with a woman’s sexual exclusivity (and domiciliary labour, her own normative expression of ‘care’).
In the Dominican economy, where wages are low and formal under-employment high, the norm of masculine provision gives way to anxiety. Investing scant resources in a single lover is precarious. Hence, low-income men repeat discourses of love as ‘vanity’ and a matter of ‘just what you have’ as they attempt to reassert control over an arena in which they feel vulnerable (young men believe that Dominican women aspire for wealthy men, local or foreign, who can demonstrably ‘care’). Yet, rather than question how symbolic and structural inequalities (patriarchy and class) inform conjugal roles (like the male provider), men express distrust towards their female counterparts, whom they disparagingly describe as materially ‘advantageous’. Cousin Sherwin summed up this sentiment,

Woman is woman. And woman nature is to find a man who can help put into them [i.e. invest in them]. But if they can take de man and squeeze all his balls to help; that is just their move and their motive.

Such anxieties illustrate the atmosphere of suspicion that infuses conjugality. For men, this finds its material basis in the ideal of provision (‘helping’, ‘putting into’ someone) which becomes fraught in precarious financial circumstances.

Given such tensions, many Dominicans contend that conjugal relations are inherently brittle, and therefore ‘replaceable’ as Rodman (1971) concludes of Trinidadian kinship ideology. Thus, relationship breakdown is to be, ‘taken in stride as part of the normal course of events’ (1971: 181). With the gwopwel, the alchemy of love suddenly disrupts this logical acceptance of conjugal impermanence and interchangeability. Lysha explained,

All of sudden now you find that woman amazing, she captivating. She find the same things. When you watch one-anodda you find deep down you have a lot of fings in common. You can relate to one-anodda better than anybody ... That love there is like a first time fing, never can be replaced ... Jus like a drug addic, every day you want that, you need that, you have to be with it.

The inaugural love of the ‘GP’ draws the entirety of one’s aspirations, resources and affections towards the beloved, causing the lover to imagine, desire and pursue only them in an enduring present and discard the ideology of ‘replaceability’ (‘never can be replaced’).

_Taking a Kicks: Why the ‘GP’ is Funny_
It is the supposed stupidity of submitting the self to love that makes the ‘GP’ funny. Many working-class Dominicans navigate uncertainty with pragmatism, taking each day as it comes in the absence of a promised future (see Miller’s ‘transience’ 1994). This extends to conjugality. And so falling in love is viewed as a choice, as Lysha argued, ‘[It is] you, that do it. You, that set yourself believing...that [love] is de only fing. Nothing last forever you know!’ So, when someone experiences a ‘GP’, relinquishes their emotional autonomy and pins their future hopes on a lover, this is considered absurd. Especially, considering perceptions of ‘replaceability’ which emphasises the likelihood of a relationship ending.

Hence, the ‘GP’ is ‘something of a standard joke... a failing in the maintenance of those values which espouse transience’, as Miller (1994: 64) concluded of the tabanka. The ‘GP’ is funny because it represents the lover’s transgression from what Dominican elders call ‘now-for-now’ desires, concerned with sex, lust and fleeting thrills - where younger men station romantic relations; to ‘transcendence’, concerned with the future, stability and delayed returns - where many women, elders and only the most confident men invest themselves. So, after banking on a future with a lover who then departs, the ‘GP’ sufferer who indulges their ‘mourning’ invites ‘kicks’ (banterous ridicule) from their peers.

Additionally, bold independence and a hardy individuality are valorised features of Dominican personhood (note, ‘being good for oneself’, chapter 1). Conceding one’s being to love is thus ludicrous; and killing oneself over an unrequited love, is madness. In this sense, the ‘GP’ constitutes a willing relegation of one’s personhood; loving another more than oneself. Particularly problematic in a place where self-love is regarded (alongside divine providence) as necessary for survival in the world. Hence, the lover is expected to receive unsympathetic jests at his ‘GP’; for he should know better than to get ‘carried away by love’.

‘GP’ humour derives too from ideas about masculinity. If love disrupts the ideology of replaceability, it also disrupts patriarchal performativity too. As Dominican historian Lennox Honychurch explained to me,

A sexual partner has left you, your control over this person has been undermined... And therefore it affects the man worse, because ... his authority, his control, his power...over this woman has been undermined by her own free will.
The ‘GP’ cases that provoke the most laughter, are those were the man was ‘playing Dan Dadda51’ or ‘Boasterman’, a hegemonic masculine posture involving charismatic orality, flashy dressing and ‘running plenty woman’. In short, ‘running life’ and living ‘now-for-now’. This whilst expecting a girlfriend/child-mother to remain faithful and submit to his sexual control. The boasterman/dan who falls to a severe ‘GP’ becomes the butt of jokes from peers who ‘take kicks’ at his downfall.

A locally infamous ‘GP’ tale is that of a Newtown bus driver known as ‘Gramaxone’. The man’s ‘child-mother’ (who was, by all accounts, an attractive and intelligent schoolteacher) left him after growing tired of him ‘running life’. He suffered a dramatic ‘GP’ and reportedly drank herbicide in an unsuccessful suicide attempt. On his first day back on the bus stop where the drivers ‘pull up’ chatting outside a Roseau bar, one witty driver called out: ‘eh, Gramaxone!’ after a common weed-killer. His peers and passengers laughed, and the title immediately stuck; offering, from thence forth, a recurring reminder of his ‘GP’ grief.

51 From ‘Don Dada’ (lit. father lord), circulated through global hip hop from the US in Jamaican dancehall music to connote a ‘macho’ male.
Such instances of womanising or domineering ‘big men’ brought to their knees by love, provoke the most laughter. The ‘GP’ is the boasterman’s Achilles heel. ‘The higher monkey climb the more him backside show’, as the proverb goes. In other words, the more elevated his ‘macho’ status, the greater the embarrassment and humour of his ‘GP’. Furthermore, the longer he languishes ‘under’ his ‘GP’, which will be particularly severe if he has lost ‘a good woman’\(^{52}\), the worse a ‘kicks’ he is liable to receive. Gramazone’s tale had the hallmarks of a hilarious ‘GP’.

So, in symbolic terms it is the contrast between his inflated initial posturing and subsequent deflation, represents the inversion of the hegemonic masculine ideal and brings ridicule. The man is seen as weak and emotionally dependent on the departed female, transgressing from the control, authority and autonomy he is expected to embody. Trinidadian calypsonian Denyse Plummer astutely summarises the gendered subversion of the lovesickness in her defiantly womanist\(^{53}\) song, ‘Tabanca’\(^{54}\).

---

52 Often described as a woman who is gainfully employed, educated, physically attractive, a committed mother, homemaker, of sound principles and from a ‘good family’.

53 ‘Womanist’ is meant here, as suggested by Alice Walker (1993), as a Black feminist stand-point set apart from dominant Euro-American feminisms.

54 This can be found at, [stable URL]: https://youtu.be/4Ds4HF8QGOo?t=1m54s
The song is a playful rebuttal to the double standards of the itinerant Trinidadian (boaster) men who, to quote her lyrics, ‘want to have their cake and eat it’; engage extra-conjugal relations and abscond with peers (‘Man never staying home //Man always want to roam’). Whilst women who ‘have to keep them satisfy // Or come up with a alibi’, are expected to provide sexual services and justify their extra-domestic movements.

For Plummer, the *tabanka*/‘GP’ creates a hilarious masculine crisis through women’s defiant seizure of conjugal control. It constitutes a micro-political insurrection against an unjust social pattern. By disrupting their patriarchal demobilisation and policed movement, women boldly ‘put horn on’55 (cheat on) their men, causing the *tabanka*/‘GP’. Thus, for Plummer the *tabanka*/‘GP’ reverses the patriarchal dynamic and humorously exposes male hypocrisy by publicly bringing the man down to size. This whilst the woman enacts sexual freedoms he once so brazenly exercised. As Plummer sings,

... *Dats why woman bound to share*

---

55 Fonseca’s (2001) analysis of female Brazilian favela dwellers’ teasing of men given the ‘guampados’ (‘the horns’) by their ‘wily’ wives and girlfriends very closely resembles this Caribbean dynamic.
De same point of view,
If man feel dey go' walk wiv spear
De woman go' have one too!

- [chorus] -

And he a get - **Tabancaaa**
Man cyaa [can’t] take it,
Man cyaa stand it,
When he get it
Man does ball [cry]

**Tabancaaa**

It does make man chew barbed wire
Bounce their head up against a wall
**Tabancaaa**

It does make some giants tremble
It does make some big man fall.

....Man will face he lion’s den
But man cyaa face one at all!

Plummer’s juxtaposition of the ideology of male conjugal strength and the reality of male weakness in the face of love, neatly encapsulates the comic irony of the tabanca/’GP’. Throughout, her calypso she demonstrates how the affliction presents a humorous affront to the hegemonic
male conjugal pose (of the Dan/Boasterman). In the following section I, examine how men ardently avoid and magically explain-away the ‘GP’ to maintain the integrity of this pose.

**Preventing and Mystically Explaining ‘Makoness’**

**Prevention**

_Yo di toute mako ke mort kwé vè_

[they say all weak men will die forced]

- **Kwéyòl proverb**

In Dominica _makoness_ is the inversion of hegemonic masculinity. It perhaps best translates as ‘sissyness’. The _kwéyòl_ noun connotes a flamboyant, weak or effeminate man. Though _mako_ may allude to homosexuality, it specifically refers to gendered behaviour, deportment, style of speech and gait. On a spectrum of masculine ways-of-being _makoness_ conveys a model of masculinity that is denigrated as ‘soft’, the opposite to The Dan who embodies a ‘macho’ disposition. Whilst _mako_ status is derided but also comical (for its anti-normative play), Dan status is lauded yet precarious (for its hyper-normativity and thus having more ‘respect’ to lose – see the monkey proverb, above). Dominicans predominantly use the term _mako_ in the sense discussed here rather than how Trinidadians use it to mean ‘nosiness’ (‘to _mako_ people business’). That said both may have a common root in the _kwéyòl_ makoumé (auntie, lit. ‘my co-mother’; _fig._ one who gossips).

The proverb that opens this section refers to the perils that befall a weak man who allows others to, as Dominicans say, ‘take foot’ on him (take advantage of him). In this regard the gendered conduct of boys is especially regulated\(^{56}\) – particularly by male peers and kin – to prevent them from expressing _makoness_. The notion that ‘all weak men will die forced’, refers to the idea of a man dying from overwork, trying to provide for a materially demanding woman. Those termed _mako_ are considered mentally weak and hence more susceptible to the ‘GP’. A _mako_ dotes on his woman, continuing to ‘maintain’ her, even whilst she may lack ‘respect’ (sexual faithfulness) for him or reciprocate his affection.

\(^{56}\) A policing that is analogous to that of the sexual conduct of adolescent girls by their mothers, elder female kin and fathers.
Mothers and aunts collude in the patriarchal prevention of makoness by, ironically, teaching their boys domestic proficiency (cooking, cleaning etc.). Scratchie once told me his aunt would insist, ‘I teaching you all to do these fings [so] that if in life women cyaa cut style on all you!’ Makoness constitutes a man’s explicit emotional and/or material dependency on another, most notably a woman. In the Dominican patriarchal order, becoming explicitly dependent, that is, a man acknowledging his emotional or physical dependence on a woman who is not family, is deemed problematic to his masculine personhood. This is evinced in a popular mantra echoed by men of many ages: ‘a man have to know how to cook, he can’t depend on a woman pot’. A host of Dominican male Facebook posts seem to reflect this attitude. They feature photos of meals proudly prepared by men and captioned with some version of: ‘so no woman can’t cut style on me!’, emphasizing their alimentary independence.

---

57 I never heard females referred to as a mako. Rather, women who dressed and comported themselves in a typically masculine style - sporting fitted jeans, baggy T-shirts, baseball caps, short hair, ‘liming’ at popular sports bars and playing football – were termed malnoms (‘bad men’) or described as malnom-ish. Like the mako, the malnom may be assumed to be homosexual, to be zami (lesbian). Yet, there is far less derision of malnoms or objection to female homosexuality in the region (perhaps as Barrow [2011] notes of zami in Carriacou, because lesbianism is maybe not patriarchally perceived as ‘real’ (phallic) sex or a challenge to normative masculinity.
To ‘cut vari’ (style) is to begin thinking oneself better than another and deny them recognition. To accuse another of ‘cutting style’ is to accuse them of rejecting egalitarian ideals. In its most common usage, ‘cutting vari’ refers to a woman refusing to cook, provide other domestic services (e.g. washing clothes), or have sex with her man - all indicative of waning affections. ‘Cutting style’ in matters of love is not so much an issue of reliance on a lover, but that reliance being

Dominicans have an array of ‘crab antic’ accusations each morally directed to maintaining such egalitarianism: copawaizon (adj. uppity), ‘highty tighty’, ‘fresh’, to ‘forget’ someone, to ‘pass someone straight’ (pretend not to know someone) etc.

Ironic use of the term given the patriarchal inequity of conjugal normativity; reflective of masculine entitlement.
explicitly levied against the other. Hence, accusing a girlfriend of ‘cutting vari’, is to problematise female protest as an illegitimate and malign act of power. For example, when a woman stops cooking she leaves her man’s dependence on her plain for all to see. Men’s anxieties about their conjugal dependency produce such vari accusations.

The photos above illustrate Dominican men’s everyday concerns about their conjugal power and autonomy. They speak to insecurities with their ambivalent position as provisioning patriarchs and domestic dependents. Dependant on the feminine domains of home and family, where women manage daily affairs, finances and food. Beyond household repairs, which may also be undertaken by other male kin, male partners are normatively depended on only for provision and occasional discipline. A man cooking for himself becomes a small but significant symbol of independence in the domestic domain and conjugal relations.

Similarly, men’s narrow domestic role perhaps also amplifies the significance of their provision and its close tying to women’s monogamy. Therefore, the lover of a woman who begins to ‘cut style’ quickly becomes suspicious of her ‘fucking on his head’ (‘horning’ him). Such perceptions can lead to a ‘GP’ since they are taken as evidence of unrequited love. A ‘GP’ will be deeply felt where he was economically supporting her, since a breach of the latent conjugal contract of fidelity for provision has occurred. Returning to makoness, men who ‘allow’ women to ‘cut style’ whilst staying with and maintaining them are denoted makos; as is he who turns a blind eye to his woman ‘horning’ him. Therefore, masculinist public declarations of being vari-resistant signal vigilance against the risk of being called a mako or getting a ‘GP’. In short, maintaining the fiction of a conjugal upper-hand reduces men’s perceived risk of getting a ‘GP’.

Love Magic: Mystically Explaining Makoness

Makoness constitutes a symbolic affront to the hegemonic masculine conjugal model. As such, makoness must be explained-away. The chasm between the ideal and the maco’s weak conjugal position, demands semantic reconciliation for the hegemon to retain its viability. Herein, observers often turn to occult explanations to explain the maco’s aberrant behaviour. According to patriarchal ideology the suicidal man (mentioned above) could not have intentionally taken his life for a woman, but must have been compelled by love magic; a form of obeah called kakoing or charméing, intended by a woman to ‘tie’ or ‘hold’ a man. This produces a severe ‘GP’ if the relationship breaks down. Dominicans joke about magic enacted upon doting men, as Mr Greggs
often would about a fella in Newtown he would see passing with his woman. To Greggs there was no other explanation as to why the stout security guard in his 30s would collect his girlfriend from the house of her ‘outside’ lover then accept the man cursing him for darkening his doorstep. Nor was there another reason for him to wait patiently by the road for her to pass him their laundry from the bus passenger seat - the seat typically reserved for a bus driver’s ‘lickle frien’ (romantic/sexual interest) - as she sat in giggling with the driver. ‘[And] de partner taking all dose fings!’ said Greggs astonished. Greggs explained,

Yah! So she can do what she want, and you have to accept what coming your way. And mister know for sure different fellas does be checking her. Dat is makoness!... ‘it’s] as if de woman do mista something, man?!’ Fellas say, ‘what?! De woman kako you, man?!’

Pride, ‘respect’ as it is termed locally, is so central to the maintenance of masculinity that it is unfathomable to observers that a man would turn a blind eye to his woman’s sexual transgression without at least ‘making noise’ with her (or worse). Thus magic, is suggested to explain the absurd. In Antigua, Lazarus-Black observed this need to explain-away men’s counter-normative conjugal behaviour,

[Antiguans] suspect a man has been tied when he stops acting like a “real” man... “he acting foolie, foolie” ... [He] turns a deaf ear to his girlfriend’s misconduct... he stops visiting his friends and family and he spends an unusual amount of time at his woman’s house (1994: 159).

Thus, his ‘foolie foolie’/kako behaviour is so out of step with that expected of a ‘real man’, that this dissonance leads observers to magic as a means of explaining the inconsistency between observable reality and patriarchal norms.

When I asked cousin Bwiggas about the relationship between such magic and the gwopwel he emphasised that the former is an intensification of the latter, ‘That’s a super gwopwel! yeah man! He can’t see far from her, eh’. The bewitched’s amorous obsession with the beloved is so powerful that it can never be sufficiently requited. Hence, the enchanted is described as malade or ‘sick’ by peers, kin and neighbours, regardless of whether they remain together or break up. So strong is the effect on the charméd man that his is a-‘GP’-waiting-to-happen.
Likewise, love magic may also be directed from male to female – i.e., ‘a man making his voodoo for him to make sure he get his woman’, as Sharon noted. Though, she conceded, ‘seldomly you will find it going from a man to a lady’. Whilst most women would never admit to something so taboo as *charm*ing a man (Sobo 1993: 305), the motivating factors in most rumoured cases were cited as either: the will to demobilise a roving lover; or to ‘tie’ a rich man, securing the unilateral flow of his provision. Women are rarely identified as victims of love magic because their normative conjugal role is that of a docile recipient/redistributor of male provision, expected to ‘hold’ their man through sexual desire, love, homemaking and ‘making’ his children. It is only when men express similar deference towards female partners and fail to patriarchally police women’s sexual transgressions that it is considered noteworthy and love magic becomes the explanation.

Given the perceived potency of such spells, it is unsurprising that men take great precaution to avoid them. Funnily enough it is through such active avoidance, however, that men develop a keen knowledge of how such magic operates. ‘They say it ave different *tekniks*... it ave a lot of different ways you can *charm* a man’, Joel told me. So, in synthesising the explanations given to me, I delineate three types of love magic which I call: (1) ‘everyday household magic’ ;(2) ‘book magic’; and (3) ‘man *charm-ing* his own self’. All (like most ethnographic accounts of love magic) are in their own way examples what J G Frazer classically termed ‘contagious magic’, which operates via,

> the magical sympathy which is supposed to exist between a [hu]man and any severed portion of his person... so that whoever gets possession of human hair or nails [or other bodily matter/substance] may work his[her] will, at any distance, upon the person from whom they were cut ((1890] 2009: 96)

In Dominican cases, rather than just ‘doing a work’ on the bodily matter of the victim, portions of the agonist (their blood, sweat etc.) can also be used to sympathetically spellbind the lover who ingests them. The consumption and assimilation of female bodily substance into the male emotionally ‘ties’ and compels the him towards the her, irrespective of will.

‘*Everyday household magic*‘ involves the sexual and reproductive substance of a female – her menstrual blood or ‘water’ (vaginal fluid), concealed in food or drink, to be ingested by a male target. It was described by Bwiggas as follows,
It’s like if a girl want you and she never want you to leave her. Like you on your move already... before you leave she will try to give you something in your drink or in your food... she could put [on] her panties til at a time when they well dirty up, so like they got her water, and put it in her food for you so that you eat that and so you will stay, no matter what shit she do.

In Trinidad, this is jokingly referred to as ‘sweat rice’, as this blogger outlined,

If you are in love with a man, and want him to fall madly in love with you... boil a pot of rice. When the rice is cooked you strain it and then put it back in the pot when it’s still hot, get naked, stoop over the pot and let your "womanly juices"... flow into the pot and mix with the rice which the object of your affection will then eat which will tie him to you forever (Dana W, Musings of a Trini in London, 2007)

In Dominica, the most commonly discussed mode of kakoing someone is through menstrual blood concealed in food or drink. Discussing this mode of enchantment Sharon explained,

Dat is mainly spell where dey give it to dem in certain fings, drinks, eat[s]... some people don’t eat red bean soup from certain women. Some men don’t drink cocoa tea from certain women ...

Brown/red coloured dishes are described as those in which menses may be concealed, and added seasonings are said to further mask the active ingredient. Hence, men will ardently avoid red beans or cocoa tea from untrusted sources, as Bwiggas testified,

If it was my granny or somebody [maybe], but to say a young chick inviting me home, to give me red beans? No boy, I doh want that! Doh gimme red beans! If that’s in that ...you not gon focking tatse dat. Dat well season-up man!... You gonna taste red beans, nice red beans – well charmé!

60 Sobo’s (1993) discussion of similar practices identified as ‘compelleance’ in Jamaica, perfectly bridges these two examples of sweat rice and menstrual blood kako-ing. She writes, ‘The most commonly adulterated food is rice and peas, a reddish brown dish. A woman can steam herself directly over the pot as she finishes cooking this... The hot steam helps gravity to ease out some of the menses’ (1993: 230)
'Book magic', is said to involve specialised practitioners, be they experts or self-taught amateurs who possess powers of divination and knowledge of ‘the dark arts’. This ritualised and esoteric form of love magic is invoked through incantations or potions, and is conducted by a (typically male) gardé zaffé or a female lay practitioner, though it has recently been cashed in on by Roseau-based entrepreneurs, who advertise such potions in the newspaper (see cutting).

Figure 16  Newspaper cutting of ‘classifieds’ advert for potions sold by Vampire Tattoo, Body Piercing and Spiritual Supply Studio, Roseau

Lay female practitioners are particularly associated with hamlets of Dominica’s interior or the southern village of Grand Bay – a place of rebel repute, associated with obeah. The only case of love magic I am aware of during my time in Loubiere involved a Grand Bay woman. She lived with her ‘child-father’, a Lexus-driving government worker from a well-to-do family. ‘You know dat boy Garry?’ Sharon queried when I asked of local charmé cases, ‘Well, his girlfriend was doing some spell to have him…. he find different spells in his mattress, little bottles and papers and stuff … I guess she just wanted to hold on to him’. Known to the village as a materialistic woman, the tale

61 This term is borrowed from M G Smith’s (1962: 147) ethnography of Carriacou, to refer to this more recondite mode of enchantment.
went that she used ‘mystic prayers’ and ‘bush water’ (herbal infusions) to ‘tie’ her ‘child-father’ and ensure his continuous ‘maintenance’. Although, I was never to know the truth of the rumour, its moral message was clear: The woman’s malevolent use of magic in pursuit of ‘vanity’ (‘worldly’ things) was discovered, which broke the spell and led to his termination of their relationship. As Sahlins has argued witchcraft and failed exchange are the ontological negation of kinship mutuality (2011: 227-8). Hence, Garry’s girlfriend’s magical malevolence in the interest of her personal gain led to the undoing of their relationship.

‘Man charméing his own self’; this refers to activities where men mystically make themselves malade for a woman. Male self-enchantment is usually attributed to cunnilingus; a practice which is at best ambivalently regarded and at worst entirely taboo throughout the region62. In discussions with young men on the subject it became apparent that publicly admitting to ‘sucking cyaat’ represents something of an admission of makoness, an expression of voluntary conjugal weakness (whether the man engaged privately in oral sex or not). Thus, young men would often talk of the risks of self-kakoing through cunnilingus; a concern which Bwiggas elucidated in a conversation between us,

... Listen Adom, when a woman ready to cum and you sucking that, that [is] what hook you to her. Coz remember, that her soul water, man! Now, you that drinking her soul water for how long, you won’t want that pussy far from you. That’s all you thinking of, man. Na man, you can’t be sucking pussy man... That’s how woman trap man. You mad?! Charmé, you charmé! You hooking yourself on de woman, you getting yourself too attach...

Young men’s anxieties about becoming ‘too attach’ to a woman are substantiated in the symbol of her potent ‘soul water’, which, much like her menstrual blood is believed to be capable of entrancing men, to the same effect as ‘sweat rice’ or adulterated cocoa tea, if ingested. Yet, the distinction in this case is that the man is seen to be inviting it, voluntarily charméying himself,

62 Cunnilingus in such cases is caught in tension between ‘The West Indian notion of masculinity [that] has built into it...[the] concept of satisfying the woman... [a] performance-oriented approach to sex’ (Sutton and Makiesky-Barrow 1977) and more masculinist ideas that dismiss the sexual act as reprehensible. In one ethnographic case in Jamaica, men who give oral sex to women were denoted ‘cannibals’ for potentially ‘eating’ their own future children in the form of their lover’s ovum (Sobo 1993: 236).
given what he should know from stories young men share about females’ bodily potency. (Indeed, some of these commentaries were undoubtedly elaborated for my own practical benefit; so that I, a young and relatively wealthy ‘foreigner’, would not charmé myself). Nevertheless, even where men are believed to accidentally self-charmé, humorous appeals to magical perversion (rather than pure volition) alleviate any challenge that the kakoed man’s makoness might pose to masculine conjugal ideals. Humour and magic function to explain-away makoish ‘GP’ behaviour, thus ironing-out its deviance from masculine ideals and keeping patriarchal conjugal ideals intact.

The only antidote to love magic that I heard of involved a young man from Colihaut who feared himself ‘tied’ by an ex-girlfriend. Despite of their constant fighting he could not seem to ‘put her down’ (break up with her). That is, until he sought counsel from a village elder who instructed him to wear his ‘sliders’ (boxers) for three weeks until saturated with old sweat - his own potent bodily secretion. He was then to boil them and drink the broth. This auto-ingestion of his bodily substance would thus counteract the binding effects of her ‘soul water’ and return lover’s being to himself. Thus, makoness and any potential ‘GP’ were to be ritually reversed.

This notwithstanding, such return of soul to self is symbolically analogous to the more gradual and natural process of conjugal learning that most people go through as they move on from a ‘GP’. It is to this process I now turn.

Learning from the ‘GP’: From Falling in Love to Pragmatic Indifference

After passing through the pain of a ‘GP’ both men and women come to learn from their overinvestment in the other; often developing a guarded stance towards love. As Lysha noted,

I can tell you truly from time a man or a woman get a gwopwel, I don’t believe.. [they] does ever recover form dat... why? Because the first time it happen to you, you had no way or means-. It [seems it] will take you an eternity to solve dat problem. But suddenly you did. So the next time, you think that can happen to you?! ...You don’t fall in love blind this time my broda.

Or as Ratty adds, extending the ‘GP’s sickness symbolism, ‘Once you get it once, you can’t get it again. It’s like measles you know... if you experience it already you not gon let that happen to you again’. Thus, for Ratty and Lysha, the locus of affective control is returned to the post-`GP’ subject who develops an immunity to the lovesickness and hence a firm grip on their conjugal future.
In this self-preserving step, women I spoke with said that following the pain of a ‘GP’ they lost all trust in men; whilst men developed an aloofness towards conjugal investment. Men often spoke of a particularly powerful ‘GP’ that set their attitude of conjugal indifference. Sitting with cousin Bwiggas one afternoon on the hill above Colihaut village I asked if he had ever suffered a ‘GP’. He began a tale of teenage love with a girl from the village; and his choice to end the relationship when she suggested they begin cohabiting. He told me that the life he had been living led him towards a karma-fearing anxiety that past deeds would return to haunt him now that he had fallen in love; thus, potentially undermining his emotional investment. He feared the risks of such a commitment so much that he suddenly ended the relationship.

I’d go at guys’ fucking girls’, man [i.e. secretly visit their girlfriends’ homes for sex]!...That’s how I lived. So I scared man, sometimes that might come back and happen to me. ... I love that girl so much, next thing I at work and ting [i.e. she’s home cheating] ... She wasn’t that type of girl, but I was scared... It’s only now I as I’m big man I really discuss that with friends of mine. They say “boy you were a pussy when you were younger”. I say “no boy, I was scared to take de chance”

The idea of his girlfriend’s infidelity, and therein his own vulnerability, made him unexplainably end their relationship. Whilst a fear of commitment might lead a man to be called a ‘pussy’, this logic is trumped by the risk (to the masculine self) of being ‘horned’. So Bwiggas stoically concealed his feelings. He would ignore her when they passed each other in the village. He suffered a silent ‘GP’ - refusing to expose any hint of his weakness. He told me,

You see when you wiv someone you really love, man, you attach to dat person. You sick! ...

[When] You all break up, your eyes watering when you look back on all the nice times all...

63 Though young men usually have an unrestrained attitude towards sex with a woman who is ‘loving’ someone, they are weary of approaching married women for fear of divine wrath – in this life or the hereafter. Leviticus (20:10) is readily quoted to reinforce such concerns. As one friend reminded, “Though shall not fornicate with thou neighbour’s wife”, you dig. ... That’s all in my head, man, because that’s a sin... I don’t want to blight [hex] or pinisyon [‘punishment’] myself.’ He was thus reminding of divine wrath that may follow such sin.
you had... Well, not all men. Some men don’t have no heart, their heart hard. That’s where I had the doctor put in my iron heart. Real hardcore!

Although brought about by his own decision, itself the result of concealed emotional sensitivities, Bwiggas’ ‘GP’ led him to his current relationship mantra: ‘always fifty-fifty; one foot in, one foot out’.

Indeed, his performative ‘iron heart’ disposition, which I call pragmatic indifference, constitutes a self-preserving pose that is common amongst Dominican men. This nonchalant attitude enables them to deal with the patriarchy-vulnerability paradox that characterises their conjugal realities. Amongst black men in America Majors and Billson (1992) have termed this posture the ‘cool pose’.

For many black men the cool pose is the way to say “you might break my back but not my spirit” ... [It is] the black man’s last-ditch effort for self-control... The young black male sees control in terms of having a weak or a strong mind. If he loses control, he becomes dangerously vulnerable to pressures that he fears will undermine him or “blow his mind”. Cool helps him stay in control over his psychological and social space (1992: 29).

Whilst I refute the authors’ essentialising (‘the black man’s’) and salvaging (‘last ditch’) characterisation of the cool pose, as well as their reference to it as a ‘mask’ or veneer (1992: 59-68; as in Dominica, I see its expression as more deeply habituated), I would argue that they astutely recognise the individual usefulness of this posture for psychically mitigating insecurities. Particularly, when dealing with something so consuming and uncontrollable as love. Therefore, given that love is seen to often send men mad, it is understandable that Rodney, a 28-year-old father and construction worker, so strongly emphasised the importance of mental fortitude in romantic relationships,

Never never never change your prospective64 of life! You could have your girlfriend, [but] always keep a firm meditation. It’s [about] what you fink. Don’t never never never let your thoughts jus carry you away... You’ll be-, Boy! Your life will finish I telling you!

---

64 Listening back to our interview I realised he said ‘prospective’ rather than ‘perspective’ as I had initially thought. Whether intentional or not, this ambiguity speaks to the conditional futurity with which Dominicans conceive of their daily lives. Tomorrow is not promised. Therefore, within this ‘circumstance orientation’
Rodney asserted the need to stay ‘focus’ and ‘discipline’, emotionally and financially; which he presented as antithetical to male desire and falling in love. Once again this invokes the transience-transcendence dualism, with Rodney drawing a distinction between a ‘now-for-now’ approach to (falling in) love and his more considered stance (this I return to). Although living with his common-law wife and their daughter for 7-plus years, Rodney adds,

..the thing with me is I try my best not to fall in love. I make love fall in me... De sad fing is the moment you try falling or standing or sitting, the moment you ever try doing something like that in love, you’ll be gone! Flash, away by de wind! ... So if you choose to love me, that’s good. I appreciate it. I show love back...I have kind of a lickle emotion, but you know, today or tomorrow we finish, you gone! Let life be, you understand.

I observed that most men from their mid-20s to 40s show little overt affection to their spouses; in many cases because they have learned from and try to avoid another ‘GP’. Perhaps they refuse to display warmth out of an awareness that the relationship may end at any point. Joel reasons,

You see de ting where you walking wiv woman hand in hand, that is majee [stupidness]! Because that same ting\textsuperscript{65} [woman] you walking with hand-in-hand, when it finish and it walking with a next partner hand-in-hand people saying “but dat not de partner dat used to walk hand in hand? And, look, now she-”. I doesn’t do dat! My love is for when we go on beach, river and at home. We walk normally as boyfriend and as girlfriend. If I choose you, as [in] I married you, den I’d maybe show you some extra appreciation. But I’m not a boasterman in public.

By learning to limit public demonstrative displays - believed to be a sign of boastful overconfidence - Joel can claim a sense of self-control and keep face; even when a woman leaves him (for another man). Furthermore, in learning from a ‘GP’ the replaceability ideology (Rodman 1971: 181) is frequently advanced. ‘It have too many fishes in the sea so man shouldn’t get a gwo pwell’, Lysha attested of ‘big hard-back men’ (grown men) who suffer a ‘GP’. Therefore, given its \textsuperscript{65}\textsuperscript{In narratives of sexualised interactions men regularly objectified women who are not spouses/kin with the referent ‘ting’. I am inclined to see this objectification as intended to discursively control women as sexual bodies whose subjectivity is often radically opposed to the will of the man discussing them. A woman would rarely be called a ‘ting’ in her presence, unless with the aim of offending her.}

(Rodman 1971), a ‘focused’ day-by-day pro/perspective, enables subjects to move with the exigencies of their existence.

86
apparent irrationality, those who have passed through a ‘GP’ repeatedly defined it as a case of ‘mind over matter’. Echoing Major and Billson’s subjects who feared a ‘blown mind’ as the ultimate loss of self-control, Dominican friends would speak of ‘not bursting their brains over woman’, that is refusing to ever again be overcome by the intense stress of a ‘GP’. As Mr Liverpool, a single-father and bus driver in his forties said of the ‘GP’, ‘Yes. I experienced it once, and I decide awa [no], not even wife... I doh bursting my meditation any more’.

Interestingly, men often shared restorative narratives of self-love as justification for their nonchalant disposition. As to why he would never (again) get a ‘GP’, Joel reasoned, ‘because I does not love nobody more dan myself... how a woman treat me, so I treat her’; or as an uncle of mine conclusively echoed, ‘I have too much self-esteem for that’. In sum, men and women reconcile a mutually guarded and avowedly self-loving post-‘GP’ posture. However, with time, the edges of this barbed distrust and apparent indifference come to soften somewhat, particularly when people find stable long-term relationships and begin, as they say, to ‘grow in love’.

Conclusion: Towards ‘Growing in Love’

Given the fractious romantic and sexual relations I have discussed, one question lingers: how do people move from the distrusting dispositions I have outlined, into more enduring unions and marriage in later life? How might attitudes shift to ease the gendered frictions that result in and arise from the ‘GP’? When speaking with many elder interlocutors (usually men and women from their 40s to 70s) about their experiences of love, I was often advised: ‘don’t fall in love, grow in love’. And herein, I believe, lies the answer to my questions. Therefore, where normative ideas do not bind people into long term unions and where pragmatism prevails, conjugal longevity demands ongoing mutual accommodation. With communication, time and tolerance tensions ease into a sustainable equilibrium. To return a final time to Sharon and her brother, Lysha,

Lysha: See dat growing in love, it happen at any stage you know. It’s a case of starting over again, you understand...

---

66 Dominicans’ generally hardy constitution is such that experiences that qualify as ‘stress’ are often so traumatic that they have the potential to entirely overcome one - physically and psychologically. As such, ‘stress’ is discursively identified then avoided and disavowed since it is closely associated with madness, ‘pressure’ (high blood pressure) and death.
Sharon: Growing in love is getting to know de person....at a point dat both of all you growing into each other. Falling in love, you give dat person your shirt, and you pick up dat draught and you fall sick with it. Growing in love is learning to understand each other. You plan what is going to happen with all you, take heed of certain fings. You and that person can be able to come together without conflict or problem.

‘Growing in love’ is a more gradual and considered return to love. It is an exercise in emotional balance. Balancing love for self and love for other; such that the self is not exposed (to falling ‘sick’) or neglected for the other. But neither does the lover become so self-oriented that they refuse to make concession towards the other. Rather, a dialogical and mutually accommodating ideal emerges as couples gradually ‘grow’ into enduring later life unions (commonly for men from their late 30s onwards).

However, friction does not simply dissipate, rather, tensions also find a sense of balance. Hence, Littlewood’s claim of Trinidad, that ‘married relationships are seen as mutually respectful but guarded’, applies to Dominica too (1993: 198). This sentiment is evinced in the trans-Caribbean proverb ‘mari teni dents’ (Trinidad; Littlewood 1993; 198;) or ‘married hab teet’ (Jamaica; Bates 1896: 41). So, whilst cohabiting spouses will often keep separate savings and men will grumble at their wife’s ‘nagging’, they come to accept their co-dependency. When Mr Polly - an elder friend in his 70s, married for 30-plus years - insists that ‘you can never trust woman 100% [because]...they can be underneath’(i.e. deceitful), it is no surprise that he also acknowledges of his wife,

I cannot say nuffing for her [i.e. say anything bad about her] ... I always tell my friends, is not every-thing your wife say to you, you will agree. Is not everything your husband tell you, you will agree. One must humble. Either the man is a humble man, or de woman is a humble person. “Oh, rah ruhg  rugh, rugh rugh” [he mock grumbles], if two of you talking what is go’n happen?!

In short, compromise and the softening of age is integral to the journey of growing in love, men give up ‘running life’ (outside relations and peer oriented living) and women learn to rely on them. And herein the tension of the patriarchy-vulnerability paradox eases, perhaps they are financially stable, both less inclined to wander and his sense of ‘respect’ is secured (see chapter 7 on
becoming a ‘family man’). So as Scratchie, who married his first ever girlfriend two years before my arrival in Dominica concludes,

    Thay say good women are hard to find. But there are good women! And I always praise Jah, he gimme a good one. See my wife, although she not perfect, but ... [God] gimme a good wife. You understand. She not a wife that demanding ... I doh hangin my heart where my hand cyaan reach. I hanging my heart where it can be content!
Chapter 3. When ‘Blood Speaks’:
Naming the Father and the Mystics of Kinship

Introduction: Anthropology and the Problem of Paternity

Maternity is proved by the senses whereas paternity is a surmise based on a deduction and a premise.

- Freud, Moses and Monotheism (1939: 180)

This axiom, that maternity is observable in pregnancy and birth, whilst paternity is a putative contention, presents a problem as old as modern anthropology. From Malinowski’s grapple with Trobrianders’ supposed ‘ignorance of physical fatherhood’ (1916; 1927); to Barnes’ delineation of ‘genitors’ and ‘paters’ (1973); to Leach (1966) and Spiro’s (1968) Virgin Birth debate; to Delaney’s (1986) return to it - so the problem has recurred. An epistemological and ontological issue, it can be simplified as such: if physical maternity is observable and thus irrefutably known, then to whom and how is fathering to be ascribed by a given society; if at all?

In this chapter I discuss this issue from the everyday ethnographic perspective of the Caribbean. I examine how in Dominica paternity can be assigned and reassigned through the naming of fathers. These speech acts demonstrate the performative power of words to speak social reality into being (Austin 1962). I explore such paternity declarations and challenges to them by various actors at various moments in the reproductive lifecourse. But, rather than focus on the majority of Dominican children whose fathers have been undisputedly named, I analyse instances where ‘name doh call’ (paternity is unassigned) or a man ‘get a false child’ (paternity is mis-assigned). These cases, though statistically infrequent (Chevannes 2006: 188), are extensively remarked-upon for they expose the problem of paternity, as a potentially tenuous premise, and thus demand a social solution.

My argument centres on one local response to the problem of paternity. Replying to Freud it suggests that paternity too may also be evidenced by the senses; if one knows how to look for it. I contend that a response to the problem is conveyed in the popular aphorism, ‘blood speaks’. That
is, ‘blood’ - literal substance and metonym for biogenetic relatedness - has a mystical means of revealing relatedness between unknown kin. I elaborate examples of blood speaking at three moments: (1) during pregnancy via a local form of the couvade (sympathetic pregnancy) known as ‘de symptom’; (2) during the ‘sit and watch’, where elders scrutinise the body of an infant for kin resemblances; and (3) during mystical encounters between kin ‘later down in life’. At each moment, phenomenological bodily clues confirm or deny paternity, quietly ‘speaking’ back to or concurring with the mother’s original declaration. Where such bodily knowledge produces a chorus of dissenting voices, the mother, who reserves the prerogative to name, may (re)assign paternity; thus declaring what everyone knows, but she must declare. In other instances, paternal female kin discern likenesses, offering the infant potential relatedness on the father’s ‘side’. In others, the child seeks-out the father, naming him for themselves. And at other times, the father remains muted, perhaps developing an undefined relationship with a child he believes is ‘his’, but is not ‘on his name’.

This chapter continues the lifecourse approach that has structured the previous chapters, but adjusts it somewhat due to the interpersonal nature of the subtle bodily affects I examine. Rather than following multiple men through their kinship biographies, I broadly follow the lifecourse of the child (see circles above) in relation to the father, tracing affects and naming through various moments in their reproductive relationship. This intends to draw attention to the transpersonal

Figure 17 - Periodicities of Paternal Naming
intimacy of the issues discussed here; of significance in a region where kinship is typically framed in individuated terms (Wardle 2004; Mintz 1965).

In addition to an interpersonal analysis of the problem of paternity and one local response, this chapter also interrogates what Chevannes calls ‘the very basic drive on the part of the male to confirm his part in the life-creating act’ (2006: 188). My goal here is to follow Chevannes in extending the conversation on Caribbean male’s reproductive activity beyond thin analyses of sexual ‘virility’ as reputation-enhancer (Wilson 1969: 71). When I read Edith Clarke’s conclusion from Jamaica, that ‘proof of a man’s maleness is the impregnation of a woman’ (1957: 96), I am compelled to ask why conception is so meaningful to masculinity? What follows is an answer from Dominica, a portrayal of the spiritual and bodily affects that deeply implicate men in the reproductive process.

This chapter is also a re-engagement with age old debates around child ‘legitimacy’, an issue over which mid-20th century Caribbeanists and administrators obsessed (Goode 1960; Otterbein 1966b; Rodman 1966). I intend to sidestep the coloniality and moralism of these functionalist mappings and policy interventions, by following my interlocutors concerns with physical paternity and naming as ‘legitimating’ signifiers, rather than top down concerns in marriage as legal legitimator. Furthermore, my interlocutors did not treat paternal naming in binary, legitimate vs illegitimate, terms as these scholars did. In contrast to such scholars, I show how ‘naming’ is analogue, instead of binary; momentary and re-negotiable instead of transcendent; and socially constituted via various actors, acts and utterances, instead of just legal documentation.

First, it is useful to offer some context on the significance of the name of the father in the Caribbean; this followed by a brief sketch of how Dominicans understand reproduction in everyday terms.
On The Name of the Father

Me: You reckon that having the father’s name is a powerful thing?

Mr Greggs: Dat is de basic fing!

In the Antilles the name of the father has undeniable significance. Where anthropologists have insisted on the universal importance of ‘legitimacy’ (Malinowski 1916; 1927) – ‘that women must have husbands, so that children have fathers... [and thus] a stable place in the world’ (Mead and Heyman 1965: 45) – in the Caribbean people place greater emphasis on children bearing their father’s name, rather than matrimony. As MG Smith observed of Carraicou, ‘the culture regards all children acknowledged by their fathers as socially legitimate’ (1962: 93). Social legitimation occurs through the giving and begetting of the patronym. With a history of the enslaved being denied marriage (Green 2007b), the policing of their inter-plantation movement producing ‘visiting’ unions (Olwig 1981), along with the post-emancipation masses practicing ‘conjugal shifting’ (between partners, throughout life; Rodman 1971) and later-life marriage (1987; Chevannes 2006: 188), it is of little surprise that so-called ‘illegitimacy’ carries no moral opprobrium for Antilleans (Manyoni 1971).

However, a glance across the region’s kinship literature suggests the same cannot be said for not ‘carrying’ or knowing the name of one’s father. RT Smith noted that it was ‘inconceivable in British Guyana that a child should be fatherless’ ([2013]1956: 133). Otterbein said that amongst Andros Islanders ‘most [legally] illegitimate children used their putative father’s name’ (1966a: 76). And one of Olive Senior’s female interlocutors unequivocally concluded,

It’s terrible, one of the worst things in life, it’s a shame you having sexual intercourse with so many men and the next thing you get pregnant and you don’t know who the father... we have one like that. She has two children and she don’t know who the father of both... she called names. Names! A child got to have names. Somebody got to be the father.

But perhaps novelist Jamaica Kincaid presents the case most powerfully in her paternal memoir, Mr Potter (2002) where she conveys the existential insecurity symbolised in the absence of her father’s name on her birth certificate,
I hold in my hand a document that certifies the date of my own birth... the name given to me... the name of my mother... the place in which she was assisted physically in bringing me into the world, and there is an empty space with a line drawn through it where the name of my father, Roderick Nathaniel Potter, ought to be... (Ibid p. 161)

... and this line drawn through me which I inherited from him... was very much meant to show that I did not belong to him, that I belonged to no one male... that no one had fathered me... (Ibid p. 100)

Thus, the symbolic power of the patronym is of great import in giving a child a place to be in the world. Indeed, following her research for *My Mother Who Fathered Me*, so persuaded was Edith Clarke of the patronym’s significance in ensuring a child’s wellbeing that she proposed a resolution to Jamaica’s legislative council for the compulsory registration of father’s names at every birth ([1957] 1999: Appendix 4). In Dominica the father’s name is no less important, as I will argue as I discuss the significance of the naming act and the ‘birth paper’. But first some context on Dominican conceptual models of reproduction and how people understand the physiological basis for such naming.

**Everyday Reproductive Concepts**

Dominican reproductive concepts are a synergy of biomedical, biblical, Amerindian and Afro-creole elements, held together through a set of common idioms. Although class, age, rural/urban/overseas residence, religion and educational background inform some variation, it is possible to sketch a general folk model of Dominican reproductive understandings.

---

67 As RT Smith (1988: 39) highlights, it is near impossible to neatly delineate the kinship concepts of different Caribbean population segments (ethnicities, classes etc). Hence, he instead arrives at Drummond’s analysis of ‘cultural intersystems’ (1980), suggesting that Caribbean people use kinship idioms like they use language, shifting registers of expression. In what follows I tease out some of the reproductive idioms at play within the Dominican kinship intersystem.
**Papa Jah** (God) orchestrates and originates the ‘act of creation’ that brings children into the lived-world. On this almost all Dominicans agree. Ras Julie, a father in his early 60s attests,

> Child must come out from Jah, to go through us [men], to go through her [woman]. Nobody cannot do dat except De Most High. De Most High dat bring you dere. It’s he dat know: a lickle seed germinating and bring a big tree.

Dominicans often deploy a seed metaphor for conception (likely inspired by biblical imagery). **Jah** provides the seed, which the physical father sows. The mother constitutes the fertile earth that ‘germinate de child’. Hence, Dominicans say that a mother ‘bear her pain’ and ‘make child’ (carries; births), it is she who contributes the physical matter of the child and in so doing takes the burden of providing a vessel for the ‘miracle’ of reproduction. By contrast, during conception men transmit the spirit of the child through their ‘soul water’ (semen), providing the biogenetic blueprint for foetal development. In short, mothers ‘bear’ and ‘make’ children; whilst fathers ‘put them there’.

The greatest disagreement lies not in the meaning of the idioms but the relative stress men and women place on them with regard to their reproductive contributions. Conception, that which for mother is a fleeting entry into a 9-month pregnancy, is for fathers the foundation of his reproductive experience. A neighbour and mother of 5 shared her maternal perspective when venting one evening about her ‘child-father’ and his custody of their 10-year-old,

> My family is my children I lie down on hospital bed and push out... What dat is mine ...I push out-, carry nine months and push out! So you can’t come and tell me I have my family [co-resident children, husband] because she is my child. Is not you that make her, is me that make her!... All you do is put her dere.... It was my choice when we break up for you to have her, coz you ask me....

For each parent procreation creates a distinct dyadic relation with ‘their child’. Mintz (1965) noted that Caribbean personhood is individuated, with kinship constituted as a network of dyads. Similarly, descent is understood bilaterally, in ‘blood’-based terms along maternal and paternal

---

68 Perhaps an inheritance from Western antiquity, as Aristotle believed, ‘semen is the vehicle through which form is transmitted, the form of the father that is reproduced in his offspring’ (Sissa 1989: 133).
These two principles – dyadic and bilateral kinship – reveal why Caribbean parents, together or single, say ‘my child’ and seldom the triadic, ‘our child’. The filial relation is discussed as if unmediated by the other parent. From a mother’s standpoint, as my neighbour highlights, the labour of bringing the child to term and into the world affords her primary rights and responsibilities for ‘her child’. Furthermore, this status gives the mother the ultimate prerogative to ‘name’ its father.

For the father on the other hand the minutiae of fertilisation are key. Here biomedical concepts, particularly the activity of gametes, are integrated with folk ideas about the mystical workings of ‘blood’ and ‘spirit’ to specify a genitor. Physical paternity is understood as singular (not partible): ‘once a woman pregnant she can’t get pregnant again’, emphasised one father. Another clarified, ‘It’s de sperm that fall... because dat already enter, and dat egg hatch, and noffing cannot enter dere again!’ Conception (the ‘sperm that fall’ and egg that ‘hatch’) creates an ‘extension’ of the man’s being in the form of the gestating foetus: ‘When you let go dat lickle drop of water [semen], that is youl’, expressed Ras Julie, echoing the old British adage of the ‘chip off the old block’ - progeny as part of the paternal self, broken from its origin. Most striking though was the extent to which the ostensibly slight male reproductive role – to simply ‘put her there’, as my female neighbour put it - is often elaborated by fathers into a deep physical and spiritual relation to the foetus.

Herein, some fathers evoke a subtle bodily sympathy between themselves and the growing child. Sylvester, a father-of-seven, for example proudly claimed to be able to sense the gender of his forming child and predict precisely when his girlfriend would give birth,

I know when dat child coming down. I know what child dat inside dere, you know what I telling you?! No woman that pregnant for me, and for her to tell me what [gender] de scan say. I have to tell her before de scan... Inside me dat coming out!

Such assertions are only possible because of how men understand their reproductive role. ‘Naturally your sperm is your blood, eh’, informed Valmond, a 55-year-old Kalinago father-of-4, adding, later that, ‘blood and spirit are one’. Positing Valmond’s claims alongside the popular proverb that, ‘family carries in the blood’, a semiotic continuity between semen, blood, spirit and family becomes apparent. Thus, when a man ‘breaks’ his semen/seed/soul water’ transmits his ‘spirit’ and ‘blood’ to his progeny who becomes kin.
In the Caribbean not only is blood a metonym for physiological relatedness (as in Euro-American kinship), but may also possess more mystical and agentive qualities (Sobo 1993). In Dominica they say ‘blood speaks’ - it ‘corresponds’, as Valmond once phrased it - through in the shared ‘ways’ (personality traits), bodily resemblances and experiences of mystical affects when brought into proximity (as I return to later). Conception sets in motion what is considered to be a natural and transcendental sympathy between kin who ‘carry’ a continuous spirit69. A spirit, transmitted on the vector of semen, which comes to eventually flow through the blood of kin.

This is not to ignore mothers’ reported contributions to the ‘ways’ and form of the child. When pressed, male and female interlocutors confirmed the contribution of maternal blood to the foetus. Some described an adversarial meeting of maternal and paternal ‘blood’ at the moment of conception. Sylvester and his ‘partner’ Indica explained,

Sylvester: De sperm is jus a cell dat leaving you. When de sperm leave you if your genes stronger dan de woman, de child will be everyfing about you! If de woman genes stronger...de child will be everyfing about her!

Indica: Like de egg of de woman have her blood in it, and your sperm have your blood in it.

Sylvester: So de child will either have her blood or yours.

Mother and father’s ‘blood’ vie for dominance much like Mendel’s dominant-recessive alleles in biomedical models of reproduction. Curiously, the tensions that often characterise barbed conjugal (see chapter 2) and parental relations (chapter 4), are writ-small in this interpretation of the microscopic interactions of gametes. However, though women’s biogenetic contribution is acknowledged, men’s contribution is greater elaborated by both men and women of various ages. This is perhaps, as I have noted, because the mother’s physical participation in pregnancy is taken as corporeally evident; whereas the father’s bodily inclusion must be mediated by the spirit. Therefore, men emphasise, and often reify the activity of blood, semen and gametes, constructing a cosmology of conception as they stake a claim in reproduction. Whereas, women emphasise the

69 Dominicans often speak of ‘spirit’ in terms of not only the soul, but ‘ways’ (behaviour traits) and attitudes which are heritable and stereotypically associated with people from particular places or those that descend from particular families.
burden, sacrifice and pain of pregnancy and birth, which afford them the right to ‘call name’. Next, the speech act of calling name, its significance and implications.

**A Mother’s Prerogative: ‘Name Call’ and The ‘Birth Paper’**

Children are named after their fathers. A woman’s children’s last names provide an oral history of her procreative exploits. Names also bind fathers to children, publicly announcing that relationships exist and reminding men of their obligations. When a man accepts responsibility for a child he “owns it”. The answers to the questions, “who fe punkin’?” and “who own the baby?” – meaning “who fathered it?” and “who will pay for its upkeep?” – are suggested by the baby’s surname.

- Sobo (1993: 147)

Caribbean mothers ‘name’ fathers. In turn, fathers ‘claim’ (or deny) children. ‘Name call’ is what Dominicans call paternity’s public declaration. This naming act occurs when a pregnancy is discovered or any time thereafter and is primarily the right of a mother. Here, she speaks social reality into being through the ‘performative utterance’ (Austin 1962: 6) of telling the father, her family and female peers that she is pregnant ‘for’ a particular man. The news then proliferates to the community. Here *pawol* (‘speech, utterance, what one says’, Crosbie et al 2001: 176), otherwise translated as ‘the word’ (Chamoiseau 1999), functions to socially categorise and designate. It attempts to deal with the problem of paternity. Where uncertainty might have existed (e.g. the mother was rumoured to have several lovers) naming attempts to fix a single putative father.

A father may protest that he has been given a ‘false child’, cuckolded by a ‘tricksy’ (ex)lover who is trying to financially ‘tie’ him (as discussed in Chapter 2). This phenomenon of the ‘false child’ has a region-wide ubiquity and various titles, such as the ‘ready-made’ or ‘jacket’ (Chevannes 2006, Anglophone islands,) or the *koute pitit* (Schwartz 2011: 36, Haiti). It provides neighbourhood rumour and humour as evidence of clandestine female sexual transgression, a cunning evasion of the double standards that govern conjugal sexuality (discussed in chapter 3). Nonetheless, at the moment of naming fathers approach their suspicions tentatively. ‘Why don’t you leave it open for her to more judge whose it is really!?’ reasoned Mr Greggs, echoing the approach of silently doubting dads. After all, any Dominican man will admit that ‘*si ou pa passay la, nom pa ka kiya*’ (‘if you did not pass there, your name couldn’t call’), as female elders are quick to remind.
Considering both perspectives, most men are forced to ‘accept’ in the knowledge that the child could be ‘theirs’ once their ‘name call’.

That said, ‘later down in life’ paternity can be refuted, reopened and confirmed (discussed below). Whilst a man’s acceptance of paternity activates obligations, it by no means guarantees paternal provision. Lingering doubts, or claims to doubt based on a desire not to face the financial burden of fathering, often inform his indifference. Such fathers rarely visit a ‘child mother’s’ home to ‘check’ their child (express regard materially). But equally, some men turn a blind eye to implausible paternity ‘out of love’ for a woman or for ‘his’ child. Here men risk the shame of the ‘true’ father boastfully exposing her infidelity or the child resembling another man. Watching the world from his veranda, Mr Gregg has seen many such examples:

Dere are cases where de man know de woman has been running around, you know; happy go lucky! But, for whatever reason, he might tell de mother it’s his child. So he claims de child... So that should put you in a situation to be unsure, you are not the only one, if it’s Jack, John, Joe or whoever else?!

As an elder male onlooker, Greggs tried to fathom why a man would overlook infidelity and claim another man’s child (think of the mako discourses of the previous chapter). Local maxim ‘love the cat take the kittens’, usually reserved for the beau pé (step-father), springs to mind here for the ‘false fada’ who does not contest his lover’s assignment. He may have grown attached to ‘his child’ in its early months/years (Chevannes 2006). Consequently, the call that rendered him the father, along with any bonding that followed, muted any contrary evidence. The man’s paternity is, for now, a public truth.

When mothers ‘call name’ they are mindful of many factors. Although their mis-assignment may be comically cunning to observers; their choice is informed by sincere concerns. Whether the man is reliable, financially forthcoming and likely to ‘claim’; of reputable ‘family name’ (but not so copawaizon [uppity] as to shun her); is married to someone else; or he is ‘de one she really love’ – each inform her decision (alongside the plausibility of the call – 9 months having elapsed). Naming is therefore risky business. As is calling no name (see Senior above). And again the double standard of conjugal sexuality rears its Janus face. The mother who cannot/does not name
a father may be denigrated as *Mamma waat/mamma wadeen*70 (mother rat/guinea pig) by
neighbourhood enemies. Asking a female friend the meaning of these terms, she retorted ‘rat doh
have plenty chil’ren, nuh?!’ - invoking the purported irresponsibility of a mother with enumerable
children and babyfathers.

Similarly, incorrectly naming a father, then later going back on one’s declaration is of potential
embarrassment in eyes of female and elder male onlookers. To ‘keep face’, mothers aim to make
a binding and correct call. Although rarely mentioned in Caribbeanist ethnography, some mothers
reject pressures to name at all, choosing instead to give the child their own surname (see Wardle
2000:49). Such defiance, usually due to sour relations or genuine uncertainty, boldly declares
the child as the mother’s sole responsibility (albeit potentially inscribing a future ‘father wound’ on the
child; Kincaid above). For the mother, this trade-off sacrifices immediate embarrassment and her
child’s paternal longing, against the self-depreciation of having to ‘beg’ a father to maintain his
child and/or subsequently become subject to his authority. In many mothers’ estimation, it is
better for a child to appear to have no father, than a ‘wotless’ (worthless) and indifferent one.

This brings me to the ‘birth paper’ where the child is normatively ‘register on de fada name’
shortly after birth. Here paternity is declared to the state and name of the father (or its omission) is
formally enshrined. If married to the mother the husband’s name is written by legal default. Where
the mother is not married (most cases) both parents must be present to co-register the birth at
the registry office. This amendment was only made in 1982 (Laws of Dominica 35:30, section 25)
before which an individual parent could go and ‘proclaim dem as mine’, as Greggs described the
registration of his children.

Like most legal documentation the birth paper possesses symbolic potency that can be activated
when required. For working-class Dominicans operating largely within a ‘world of words’ where
*pawol* has quotidian power, legal artefacts from the ‘world of letters’ have ritual force. Therefore,
the threat of bringing the matter before the state represents a final recourse. ‘I’ll sen’ court paper
for you!’, is a regularly wielded though rarely executed threat, particularly by a mother whose
‘child father’ is not adequately maintaining his child(ren). But on the occasion where she does

---

70 As Leona, a popular calypsonian laments the 2014 song entitled ‘Baby Machine’, [Stable URL:]
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UUAnPDA6Noc [Accessed 10/10/16]
bring him to court (and many do; see chapter 4), the presence of his name on the birth paper makes her likely to gain a maintenance order (Augustus 2003: 4).

In sum, ‘name call’ and the ‘birth paper’ have great performative power and symbolic significance. The following case demonstrates the implications of these in one father’s biography and the muted paternal realities such naming may conceal.

*Cleve the Unnamed Father*

One Saturday in June I encountered my neighbour Cleve, a Rastaman in his late 30s on the coastal road. I was heading home from a sea bath and he, also coming from the bay. It was the eve of Father’s Day 2013, and as we approached Elima’s shop a festive spirit was palpable. The speaker-box flooded the street with *kaiso* (calypso) and all Elima’s elder regulars were present; drinking, bantering, slamming dominoes. Father’s Day has risen to popularity in recent years with many ‘society people’ (NGO workers, teachers, pastors, politicians and business owners) using it to celebrate ‘responsible fatherhood’; and admonish those deemed delinquent to ‘play their part’. Yet, for this target audience Father’s Day has come to represent another occasion for ‘liming’; for men to celebrate, often without a child or ‘child-mother’ in sight, the very fact of being fathers (men who have children). Possessing little knowledge of these dynamics, though knowing Cleve to be a father, I suggested a drink.

As we stood inside the bar, a dapper man entered. “Happy fada’s day!!!!” he announced, addressing everyone and no one. “You may be a fada but I am a *grandfada*”, chimed Cleve proudly. “Well, I am a *graaaaand* fada”, the man countered, wielding a thick wad of notes as he paid for a shot of ‘spice’ (‘bush’ infused rum). (His ostentatious gesture playing on the association between fatherhood and financial means). An elder pitched in, challenging Cleve via me,

Elder: He maybe is a fada but not a grandfada, yet!

Cleve: No, not dem lickle chil’ren…I have a big 19-year-old dat have her own you know!...

Elder: Well, tomorrow is not your day, because tomorrow is *father’s day* and not grandfather’s day.
Cleve and I stepped outside. ‘I never knew you were a grandfada!? I stated, surprised that after countless conversations about his family life during 9 months of friendship, he had never mentioned this. He entered a story, about a Dominican girl he was ‘loving’ as a teenager. Then he added,

She had de little girl. She said it wasn’t mine; I agreed. Then we were together again and she had de little boy. Said it wasn’t mine, and I agreed with all that.

But as the children aged they began to resemble him, he said, causing ‘talk’ to flow,

Now everyone is telling me why don’t I check on my son because he looks like me. So I’m talking to her the other day and she’s telling me that’s not my problem because he’s registered on somebody else name.

Here a chorus of voices disputed the mother’s naming, proposing that the named father had received a ‘false child’ and Cleve was the ‘true fada’. But the mother’s declaration, and its formal registration, persisted as the public version of things.

‘In your own view what do you think?’, I asked,
I wouldn’t really say no because there’s nothing in those kids that looks different from those two girls I have. They look exactly the same. If you put them together you’d say ‘are you brothers and sisters, or what?’

Resigned to the impasse between their visible likeness and the mother’s naming, he added,

The other day one of the guys in Bellevie tell me... “So you doh check your children, man?!” I tell him, “but when I accept my children I didn’t get them, what you want me to do, fight with de woman?!” ... [I]’t’s life, I can’t change [it], it happen already. De only thing dat can change it is de court.

Cleve accepted this reality as one he cannot change (without the court, the mother and the named father’s agreement). As an unnamed father he can boast his paternity amongst liming peers (as I observed in the bar), whilst remaining free from the financial demands that the binding ‘name call’ and ‘birth paper’ imply. This is particularly significant given his income is low and uncertain (which I hazard to guess might have informed the mother’s original declaration).

In addition to a court order, I ask whether the child reaching out to him could also influence a re-naming. To my surprise he adds,

The little boy use to stop here every other day and come call me, check if I haven’t got a couple dollars for him to go with, you know... and I would help him out.

The boy did not ask Cleve if he was his father. He did not need to. Nor would he disrespect his mother by challenging her naming. His and Cleve’s relationship simply was. Thus the public naming of a father had submerged this other paternal reality. A nominally ambiguous relation characterised not by obligation but by a silently significant regard for kin. A small act of recognition. ‘Blood speaks’, as they say, in this instance through community member’s vocal recognition of physical likenesses. But, when muted by a child being ‘given’ to someone else, it also speaks through unacknowledged practice – through something so seemingly mundane as a few dollars when an unnamed child comes calling.
Having demonstrated the lived significance of the ‘call name’ and ‘birth-paper’, and their link to blood speaking, next, I chart three moments in the reproductive lifecourse when ‘blood speaks’ back to the mother’s declaration: (1) during pregnancy, (2) infancy and (3) later down in life. Each, in their own way, reveals Dominican belief in the mystical and agentive power of blood, in addition to people’s attentiveness to its utterance.

1. ‘De Symptom’: A Contemporary Caribbean Couvade

In *The Barbadian Male: Sexual Attitudes and Practice*, sociologist Graham Dann sketches a damming portrait of ‘inadequately socialised’, ‘machismo’ driven and sexually ‘irresponsible’ Bajan men (1987: 171). So taken is the author by his thesis on male fecklessness that in the middle of the
text something remarkable eludes him. A 30-year-old interviewee and printer’s assistant, describes his memories of almost becoming a father,

There is this girl from St Vincent. I went down there for a weekend, met this girl and I was having a wonderful time. I know when I came back here I found all of a sudden I was getting sleepy about 9 o’clock. Normally that would not be, getting sleepy, weak and tired. So I say “well look that girl get pregnant”. I say “I doubt it”. It went on until about two years after I went down there and the girl tell me yes she had a little boy. And this fellow say it is his, and he making noise for it. So, I say “well, he making noise for it, let he keep it”

(Ibid: 97)

The author dwells on the could-be father’s de-personifying use of the neuter pronoun, ‘it’, as indicative of his disregard for an unwanted child (1987: 97). Yet, the mystical bodily hints: tiredness, weakness and sleepiness; that lead him to suspect a woman is pregnant ‘for him’ are disregarded, deemed analytically extraneous.

This is no surprise. Scholarship on Caribbean fathering has rarely been attentive to its experiential affects (excluding Brown et al. 1993). As far as I am aware the passage above is the only scholarly mention of male sympathetic pregnancy, known to anthropology as ‘the couvade71’, anywhere in the region; Amerindian exceptions notwithstanding (e.g. amongst Garifuna of Honduras, Munroe et al. 1973; or ‘Island Carib’/Kalinagos of Dominica, Taylor 1950). Nonetheless, conversations with friends from Jamaica, Grenada, Trinidad and Belize reveal that the couvade as described in Dominica (and in Dann’s Bajan example) is a trans-Caribbean phenomenon. This leads me to surmise that the creole Caribbean couvade has been ethnographically overlooked since scholars have been more concerned with structurally locating and discerning the function of fathers, than examining paternal experience.

I take the Dominican couvade - ‘de symptom’, ‘de effec’, la dormi (tiredness) as it is variably termed - to disclose a neglected phenomenology of paternity and pregnancy. Thus, a Caribbean ‘father, too, takes gestation and birth into his body’ (Reed 2005: 35). Here, instead of mothers’

71Curiously, ‘couvade’ is of old French (Breton) origins, meaning to ‘brood’ or ‘incubate’ (Laplant 1991). Dominica’s first European settlers were Breton Catholic missionaries and the Kweyol of the island features Breton words. Couvade / Kouver in Kweyol refers to a hen’s incubation of her eggs. It is not used in the context of paternal pregnancy symptoms.
declarations, male bodies convey blood’s speech during pregnancy. They do so through the cues of the couvade (tiredness, aching limbs etc) which provide instances of blood’s utterance and quiet confirmation of paternity, or not (in their absence). Such utterances cannot speak this felt reality into a public one; the mother retains the prerogative to ‘call name’. Yet, the father’s attitude of embrace or rejection to the child may be informed by his experience of ‘de symptom’, or lack thereof.

What I discuss here in the Caribbean case I call a reactively embodied couvade, rather than the ritual couvade\textsuperscript{72} that is documented across Amerindian contexts (Munroe et al 1973; Taylor 1950; Frazer 1910; Rival 1998 etc.). In the reactively embodied version symptoms reportedly occur in sympathetic response to a forming child; as documented globally, including Sweden (Lundell 1999), Colombia (Browner 1983), America (Reed 2005) and China (Tsai and Chen 1997). In the ritual version, the father is prohibited from engaging in certain practices to ensure the wellbeing of the gestating child (e.g. food taboos); as documented in historic Dominica (Taylor 1950), contemporary Amazonia (Rival 1998) and various other contexts (Brennon et al. 2007). This distinction is important for two reasons. Firstly, it reveals that couvade has been used as too analytically broad a concept to describe different sympathetic paternal relations to gestating children (Kupferer 1965) – symptomatic of an un-nuanced approach to paternity. Secondly, the issue of sympathetic directionality. The reactively embodied Dominican couvade locates the phenomenological stimulus with the forming child, whose spirit acts on the father. Whereas the ritual couvade demands specific behaviours by the father directed towards the child. Thus, the reactively embodied couvade, discussed here, concerns perception rather than intervention. Directionally, it involves ‘blood speaking’ a relation of sympathy, via symptoms from child to father. This is key because my interlocutors who spoke of the phenomenon, deemed blood to be agentive (‘speaking’) hence, being perceived in the subtle bodies of kin. They believe it is not humans who activate this sympathy (other than through the life creating act) rather it is a ‘mystic’, resulting from a natural affinity between kin.

‘De Symptom’

\textsuperscript{72} This distinction mirrors Newman’s ‘ritual’ vs ‘psychosomatic’ distinction (1966). However, I adapt the latter to take ‘de symptom’ seriously as something embodied rather than simply a bodily expression of thought.
Holding a reasoning with Sylvester (a 38-year-old Rasta father-of-7) and his friend Indica (aged 37, father-of-one), I asked them how children come into the world. During this conversation I first learned about the couvade,

Indica: You’ll have sex wiv a woman. You check your vibes, you know she pregnant

Sylvester: Yeh, because you feel dat!

Me: You can tell?

Sylvester: No ... not just “you can tell”, you feel! You feel dat my brudda.... it ave signs and symptoms! You must ave toothache, you doh have no bad teeth and your teeth hurting you. It ave all your joints ... Man does get sick. Man does vomit for the whole 9 month. Things does jus happen! In different man, different vibes... So it have dem syptoms dere and dose signs dere. Fada [God] make it known to man...

Those who report it complain of any combination of aching joints, lethargy, toothache and their own equivalent of ‘morning sickness’; all evidence that a woman is pregnant ‘for them’. I was even told of a man from an interior who fainted each time his ‘child mother’ had become pregnant with their 3 children. By the last child he was so familiar with the experience that after coming back to consciousness he called her in Gwad’loup (where she resides and he lives ‘back and forth’) to tell her she was pregnant.

Men typically discussed this symptomatology in tandem with a mother’s body and mood changes, cravings and repulsions brought about by the pregnancy. There is no consensus on the duration of symptoms, some say it occurs in ‘a certain period of months from 1st month to 5th, [when] you in de process of child forming’. Whilst others would agree with a Kalinago elder who stated that he ‘used to be sick-self, man. Just sick!’ for the entire 9 months. Yet all added that symptoms stop after a child is brought to term; ‘whenever de baby born, dat give dat ting out of him’.

Furthermore, as Sylvester notes ‘different man, different vibes’; many are acknowledged not to experience it at all.

Of the 38 men I spoke to on the subject, only 8 had felt ‘de symptom’.73 But of all the males and females spoken to, everyone knew someone who had experienced it. One afternoon, Joel, a

73 However, some who did not experience it had other spiritual and ‘mystic’ experiences that brought them
handyman and father-of-one who had experienced ‘de sympytom’, explained its ubiquity. The TV was playing U.S. chat show Maury in the background, and by chance it featured an African-American man awaiting DNA paternity test results for a child he claimed was not his. ‘You are not the father!’ read Maury as the crowd erupted, to which Joel commented,

Like all dose show dat coming dere, [re: elated man on TV] mista and dem don’t know about dat, because he should know from since a woman pregnant for him he must get a symptom. He doh know maybe for da whole week he sleepin in bed he doh feelin to go work, but he doh pick up [that it’s] de symptom. But we in de Caribbean we know about dose ting dere, we hear our parents, our grandparents talk about dose ting dere.

Many, like Joel, cited ‘de symptom’ as something discussed by elders and passed on in everyday narrative. Amongst male peers and colleagues, it is so widely recognised that it has become a colloquialism, as Indica and Sylvester explain,

Indica: man does do dat like a slang if man does come and meet you sleeping: ‘you got a woman pregnant for you, man?!’…

Sylvester: I is man I does make de bossman know my woman pregnant, ‘so if you see me sleeping doh feel no way’. So sometime de bossman ask you, ‘how much month she be?’…I’d tell him five months, he say ‘ok my boy, doh feel [worry] man, jus now dat [will] stop, man’… Because de man know de business.

Male colleagues and peers recognise pregnancy symptoms in one-another’s bodies, and often express understanding towards their plight. If not a boss, a mother or aunt may make the joke, as Ma Buttercup, the fictional mother and alter-ego of Dominican internet comedian JingleJam illustrates. In a skit she berates JingleJam in a harsh but comical tone familiar to most Caribbean people; complaining of the laziness of ‘children today’. ‘All-you lie do’n in your bed until 12-o’clock as if all-you was running lugarou [werewolf] last night or you have a woman pregnant for you! Which one?!’ she lambastes, highlighting two mystical explanations that could only excuse such indolence. Thus, a fictional mother hilariously transmits folk knowledge of ‘de symptom’ to phenomenologically into pregnancy. One father, for example, spoke of visions declaring the gender of his future child before any scan was taken and prophesised birthing complications which eventually came to pass.
her male child. The comical resonance of the reference (evidenced by YouTube comments and hits) reflects the ubiquity of the concept.

Figure 20 - Jingle Jam video skit, YouTube

Asked what causes ‘de symptom’, most suggested spiritual sympathy between father and child discussed above. De symptom is believed to be the result of the forming child drawing energy from the father to whom it remains continually connected ‘in de blood’ and spirit, throughout gestation and birth. I asked Valmond (mentioned above) what causes it. He speculated,

I think maybe your blood... I'm checking it's something the woman take from you, have from you... a, strength, or whatever....Just like [for] de woman, dey say its child that's causing you to be so, you know. Is de child, you know. Is de feeling man! Dey jus give you a feeling...a different feeling

Mr Greggs answered the same query,

I think it's the spirit because...it's another being! And ... the creation of another life force. So it affects you, you know.... And then it takes a matter from you, when you are enjoined [sexually] with the woman... to get that creation. So I think it's a reflection...you know, the

74 Online. [Stable URL:] https://youtu.be/WZQorZjcozw [Accessed 10/10/16]
presence of that being forming in de woman it sort of tells itself on you. So you feel a way...

Greggs and Valmond see blood/semenal ‘matter’ and spirit/ ‘life force’ as inseparable from each other, and from the bodies that impart them. Greggs’ couvade description is instructive: ‘blood speaks’ through ‘de symptom’ ‘telling itself’ on the father’s body, which becomes a ‘reflection’, a sympathetic mirror, of the forming child. Both these experienced elder fathers can recall an era when ethno-medical and naturalist ontologies of the body predominated. Valmond and Greggs expressed an intricate sensitivity to the couvade’s causes and effects.

Although a generation younger, Rastas Star and Indica shared this sensitivity. They connected each symptom in the father to its corresponding feature on the forming foetus, which they say, playfully pulls resemblances from the father. When the father gives in to la dormi (tiredness) and ‘sleep ketch him’, this is when the spirit of the child appropriates his characteristics (body style, gait, somatotype, fingernail shape),

Indica: …it is [your] yout [child] dat want a vibes of you, you check. Pulling dat, nuh man - all out!

Sylvester: All how you want to sleep, de child dat inside de stomach want a nose or want a piece of a eyes... It ave to put you to sleep. Because remember dey tell [you that] Fada [god] take out de rib from de man to make de woman? So it’s just on a level like dat. De child maybe want to take de form of your nose for de child to look just like you.

Indica: Spiritual kind of a vibes.

Sylvester: Spirit working, I telling you! De spirit have to leave you to go inside de child to take a shape dere ...a mystic fing you know! ... It want it foot to be all how your foot is. And you see your child born and she walking just like how you walking? Yes boss! At de moment you were sleeping, dat time de spirit working boss!

Together the two friends reconciled a common understanding of how the spirit of the child ‘works’ to draw out paternal traits. A transpersonal energy is summoned from the father to the child, the latter cunningly putting the former to sleep to enable its extraction. They argued that aching limbs, for example, occur when the father wakes to find such energy and likeness has been spiritually excerpted. Several such conversations confirmed that people’s mystical sensitivity to
such phenomenon affords them a degree of creative license in elucidating ‘de symptom’ (as is true for all the ways ‘blood speaks’).

Explaining how the ‘de symptom’ is triggered during conception also offers room for interpretation. Joel described the phenomenon’s cause as an ethereal counter-flow of energy from mother into father (against the direction of semen) at conception,

Remember when you sex a woman you put sperm into her ...that is part of you. Sleeping next to her, waking up next to her-. Everything in the world is energy you know! A woman by you, you feel her-, her body, her heat. So all that connection and heat can penetrate you and go inside [of you]... That how I figure it out; it jus natural... all-you sleeping together whole night, her genes mixing with yours.

Fascinatingly, Joel’s explanation resembled Kalinago beliefs about fathers’ ‘mystical participation’ in pregnancy documented by Taylor (1950:347); specifically, concerning bodily ‘heat’ (physiological arousal) exposing men to the ‘exuberant humours’ of women. He wrote that men were,

thought to be endangered by a sort of physical exuberance emanating from heated, overfed, sexually or otherwise excited, pregnant, or menstruating [female] bodies (Taylor 1950: 347).

Similarly, in Joel’s rendering of conception, intercourse caused women’s bodily heat/energy to enter men, and manifest in symptomatic form; mirroring male semen entering a woman and creating a baby. For Joel, exchange of heat and semen with the mother at the moment when ‘genes mix’, created an enduring sympatric link between father and child. More than half-a-century after Taylor, Joel’s model blended biomedical reproductive concepts (‘genes mixing’) designated in schooling, public education and global media with those inherited from Dominica’s indigenes (documented as far back as the 18th century; Breton in Taylor 1950). Importantly, this suggests that far from being a ‘social isolate’, as Dominica’s indigenes have been depicted (Hulme 2000), Kalinago share beliefs with the general population, some of which are inherited from indigenous ancestors.

---

75 This echoes chapter 3 and men’s sensitivity to the mystical power of female bodies – i.e. their menstrual/sexual secretions and love magic.
Whilst I met many Dominicans who affirmed ‘de symptom’ as reality, others (a third of those spoken to) refuted the explanations I was given, dismissing them as ‘mind over matter’. In several group discussions the phenomenon caused quarrels between those invested in enchanted interpretations and those who were more rationalist. I have presented mostly the former. Not because I endorse this perspective, but because of my interest in what belief in ‘de symptom’ does. How it functions to involve male bodily selves in the process of birth; tells fathers a child is truly ‘theirs’; and offers a meaningful physical foundation from which to build fatherhood.

My attention is thus drawn to the bodily mindfulness some named fathers exercise as they look for the couvade’s corporeal clues. As Greggs highlighted,

Some people will know if is their child and if is not their child because they know their feeling... They definitely does know if that is true or false.... All dem tings you have to mark dat. All of those things is a sign - you can easily know if it is your own... Then he is sure that the child is his because he knows the effects.

Speaking of experienced serial fathers, who have felt paternity before, Greggs mentions how men use bodily ‘signs’ to determine their paternal status. The following example explores this notion of ‘de symptom’ as paternity test. Here Vanley inspects himself for symptoms to dispel doubts about his pregnant ‘child-mother’, who he suspects of giving him a ‘false child’.

Vanley’s Story

I first met Vanley, a recovering ‘parro’ (crack addict), in early April 2013. I was visiting Will to Know (WTK), a drug and alcohol rehab centre, where he was living with seven other men. Following their daily Narcotics Anonymous meeting, reformed alcoholic, CarlMAN colleague and WTK director, Bonti introduced me to the fellas. Hearing about my research, Vanley later approached me, anxious to talk.
He unfurled his life story, sharing his recurring drug troubles, rehab in Antigua and *gwopwel* for his pregnant girlfriend, who he suspected of infidelity. He told me he is ‘*mako* for her’: pilfering food from the centre for her, washing her clothes and cleaning her house. She had recently named Vanley as the father of the child she was carrying. He added that he saw a man leaving her house recently, and believed they were having an affair.

Although never mentioning any suspicion of getting a ‘false child’ Vanley’s observant stance conveyed quiet doubt. His self-examination for de symptom suggested a need for confirmation. He mentioned feeling ‘de symptom’ for both of his previous children, ‘bad!’, whilst working as an agri-produce delivery driver and trusted it as a paternity test:
Tiredness! My first daughter? Sleepy! When I used to have to go to work for 2[pm]...I normally would have to get up around 3 hours [before].... And all like now I'm sleeping... look how it's 2 o'clock, and all like now I'm dozed off. I would be on the steering wheel [snoozing] and my girl pregnant, about 6-7 months, eh!

... Once de child is yours, and dis is one of de mystics, the ancestors used to know if a child is dat person own or dat person own. So if a woman come an tell you, “I pregnant for you, wii”, you, de fada, must feel some effect. Whether you sleepy or your mood change or you tiyad or-, you know. I can tell you that from experience, dat is true!

However, in this instance he was yet to feel any clear symptoms. He spoke of ‘feeling a little breakdown’ (i.e. depressed/lethargic) but dismissed this as an outcome of his ‘GP’. He mentioned tiredness - ‘yesterday as I tell you I was feeling a little bit sleepy’ - but dismissed this as the result of doing ‘a little too much work, because basically I wasn’t relaxing’. So with no conclusive evidence, Vanley resigned to maintain a vigilant bodily reflexivity. This in the hope that physical paternity would become evident in his body: ‘I watching still because as the pregnancy will progress, the effect becomes stronger, you understand. So I watching still’, he concluded.

However, where such observations yielded no confirmation, then a ‘sit and watch’ could be in order following childbirth.

2. The ‘Sit and Watch’

The air was muggy that Friday morning in Magistrate Augustus’ courtroom. The sweltering atmosphere was tempered only by the occasional caress of four electronic fans, struggling to cool a heated dispute between a woman and her putative ‘child-father’. The man argued from the defendant’s dock, that the infant for which he had been summoned on a maintenance order was not his. The mother, on the witness stand opposite, insisted that he was the father and repeatedly failed to fulfil his duties. The dispute seemed intractable, each party sparring back and forth as me, the magistrate, the clerk and two police officers watched on. The father eventually tried to draw a line under the matter by insisting that he would withhold ‘maintenance’ until he can verify the child as his own. To do so he would bring the child ‘by’ his mother for her to determine once and for all if he is the father. By this point, the magistrate who had allowed them to vent for long enough, appeared to be lose patience. ‘Get the money and do a proper DNA, not a sit and watch!’ she snapped, signalling that only a medical DNA test might ‘take a child out on de fada
name’ (delete him from the ‘birth paper’ against the mother’s word). Eventually the man resigned to pay for EC$1,040 (£260) medical paternity test to settle the matter; then added, ‘if he is not my own I setting him free!’

This was the only case in my 14 months of observing family court proceedings that anyone agreed to do ‘a proper DNA’. Whilst such tests were regularly mentioned by the magistrate and parents, seldom were they actually undertaken. Beyond the prohibitive cost (EC$1,040 is over a month’s average wages) the main reason seems to be that people invest greater trust in the tried and tested ‘sit and watch’. Barry, a professional and 40-year-old Colihaut resident, exemplified the faith many have in this traditional paternity test,

See de Americans and wherever dey come out [come from] with dat DNA ting, dat was dere already with our grandparents! Dey were de one dat giving de DNA. And dey even better dan de machine now. Me dat telling you!

‘Sit and watch’ is a customary practice in cases where paternity is contested, mis-assigned or undefined. It involves an elder female (mother, granny, auntie or nennen [godmother]) having a child brought to her, her inspecting the nuances of the child’s physical features (e.g. fingernails or bow legs) and bodily style (e.g. gait or body techniques), then declaring it kin, or not. Upon confirmation of resemblance her performative statement, ‘za se zanfan nou’ (‘that is our child’) speaks the child’s kinship to the paternal family.

The term ‘sit and watch’ is itself significant. To sit connotes waiting: for an infant to reach the age where discernible features show (from 3 years I was told); and waiting during the ritual, which demands the sitting elder’s concentrated scrutiny. Whilst ‘to watch’, gardé in Kweyol, is associated with the divination of the gardé zaffé (seer/obeah man) whose optics enter the occult, this ability to look is reflected in the quotidian clairvoyance of the elder who gazes into minute resemblances to locate common genealogy. Highlighting particular elders’ uncanny capacity to discern kin,

76 Dominica does not have a family court per se. Instead, all child maintenance, custody, domestic violence and some juvenile matters are seen in the magistrate’s Friday court which is reserved solely for such matters. (See recommendations section of conclusion)

77 However, as the magistrate often presented it, the $1040 can be seen as an investment against the thousands that might accumulate in arrears ‘on a false-child’.
George, a father and quarry worker from Colihaut asserted, ‘It’s not a joke! When dem people tell you dat is dere child, you cannot tell dem no! Dey know! Dem people know deir people by finger nail, *wil*!’

The position of such female kin, as seasoned (grand-)mothers and charismatic family organisers, commands a special authority to ‘speak’ on kinship matters. As paternal kin they can mount a more audible and authoritative challenge to the mother’s initial naming than a father. This is based on kindred knowledge and experience that extends back to recent ancestors; ‘dey were dere long before us so dey can say’, George noted. He continued,

Because dey see Tom, dey se Harry dat was dere long before. Dey can tell you, ‘You’re walking just like Tom, you walking just like Harry’. ‘All your move is dat one’s own. So dat is dat person child’, or ‘dat person is our family’. Whether you like it or not, they will let you know!...It is a fact!

The force and finality of elder female naming comes out clearly here. This secondary naming creates a corresponding truth from the father’s side that either concurs with or contradicts that of the child-mother.

The outcome of the ‘sit and watch’ informs a man’s behaviour towards his purported child. Where resemblances are lacking, this may be taken to prove a false child; especially if he had suspected the child too light/dark in complexion or too lacking their familial traits, to be his. In such cases men were reported to suddenly opt out of their ‘responsibilities’. ‘He never give me a pin, neither a pound of sugar, neither a tin of milk for dat child... Noffing!’, recalled Mary, a Colihaut elder, about a child-father who denied paternity after his mother determined Mary’s child was not his.

Conversely, the elder female may insist on her absconding son/nephew/grandson taking up his responsibilities towards a child declared as his. George echoed this: ‘when dey tell you dat child is yours, don’t give dem no two-back [backchat], jus know dat is your child. They know!’ Perhaps the elder’s dual positionality, firstly as a woman and mother, thus aware of her son’s fatherly shortcomings, and secondly as his kin, hence protective of his interests (i.e. not being saddled with a ‘false child’), promote a degree of balance in her paternity assessment. Additionally, where a child is determined as ‘their’s’ but the father still refuses to ‘check’ him/her, paternal grandmothers may develop relations with the child directly (child-mother willing). In such cases the child may ‘go
by’ (visit) the grandmother or aunt and her cohabiting kin, thus enabling the child to ‘know’ (meet, become aware of) their paternal kindred; irrespective of the father. Although grandmothers seldom overturn the naming of a father (again this is a matter for the mother, the courts or the child themselves, as the next section reveals), their corroboration of the mother’s naming of their son does sometimes lead to a bilateral maternal childrearing alliance between paternal grandmother and mother; even where mother-father relations are acrimonious.

In sum, the ‘sit and watch’ manifests blood’s utterance through the reading of kinship from the body of the child and the elder’s edict. Here blood speaks through resemblances. This notwithstanding, in some cases it takes until adulthood for blood to reveal a father’s identity. Here blood speaks in other ways.

3. Paternal Encounters ‘Later Down in Life’

Some of my interlocutors lived their childhoods without knowledge of their father’s identities; the latter remained unnamed or mis-assigned. In such instances the ‘true’ father’s name remained unknown or a public secret; that which is suspected, even tacitly known by family, friends or neighbours, yet remained undeclared by those who could intervene (mother, magistrate or elder). Since ‘true’ paternity has not been fixed by ‘the word’ this muted relation remains unacknowledged throughout a child’s life (note Cleve’s case above). Nevertheless, in some instances hearing ‘talk’ amongst community members who vocalise visible resemblances between the child and a man the mother is rumoured to have had relations with may compel the child to seek-out an unnamed father ‘later down in life’. Here, the adult child may deviate from the mother’s naming and try to (re)assign paternity themselves through contact with and recognition from this unnamed man. For example, Greggs shared the story of a married man in Newtown who had an ‘outside’ affair with a woman who later gave birth to a boy child. The mother was caught in a bind between giving the married man an ‘outside child’ and her boyfriend a ‘false child’. She chose the latter, though Greggs held that that the child was misassigned - ‘it’s evident... everybody in de community knew’, Greggs claimed. Yet, only when the child became an adult did ‘blood speak’ through his neighbours, urging the boy to approach his ‘true’ father. As Greggs explained,
He [the man, was] married, he have his children with his wife, but he get to have a lickle fling outside dere.... in between she’s pregnant, you know. Now she, de woman, to save face she does not say directly, 'look, married man this is for you'. She gives her boyfriend... she makes him think this is his child. But it is while the child is growing up, one is having a hint, or some knowledge of he really used to go with dat other woman. All time de boy growing up ... he’s not seeing his father, the real father, [it] is de one dat was given to him. But in growing up like everybody recognises-, [even] de man himself, he would say ‘Boy, dat is my son you know!’ He know he have an affair wid de woman. Dat is his son. And people who knew they had an affair would check, ‘boy mista is mista’s son’.

Eventually word got to the boy,

And when he gets de knowledge he admits, ‘Boy, is really true you know, boy! Look at dat other son mista have dere, boy. I find I big like mista... and I looking like dem.’ He goes to de man, and de man admits, ‘Ay, you are my son for true. Your moda did somefing, or maybe she want to save face’...So naturally he would leave the fada de mother give him, and go to de man he know who is his fada. Yeah, de blood is speaking, de blood is speaking. And de man would agree really, ‘boy, I had an affair wid your moda, and you really are my child’ and ‘let’s go!’

When the boy came of age, he sought out his ‘true’ father. Hearing ‘talk’ (rumour) in the community, as well as seeing resemblances to the man in himself and his kin, the young man from Gregg’s neighbourhood confronted him and received a declaration (“you really are my child”). Up to that point respect for his mother, and the expectation that children should not concern themselves with ‘adult business’, likely stopped him from questioning the mother’s assignment. However, for some grown children such as the young man, a strong desire to know their ‘true’ father, coupled with their arrival at adult status, compels them to approach their unnamed fathers - irrespective of the mother’s word.

That said, in instances like the following - where an adult child respected the naming decision of the mother - the paternal revelation was left to a serendipitous sequence of events. Here blood
spoke throughout the lifecourse, mounting pressure on an elder father and mother to finally declare their adult son’s paternity.

How Scratchie Came to Know his Father

‘I grew up without a man figure in the home... always a single-parent kind of a vibes’, Scratchie told me one evening. He ‘raised up’ not knowing a father; his mother never named one. And like Kincaid (above), his birth paper was scarred by a line through the box designating the patronym. He always longed to know this man; insisting, ‘dat is what I always wanted in my life!’ But he respected his mother too much to ever interrogate her silence: ‘As I tell you it was never in my position to go and ask that question, you dig’. ‘Until that day, eh...’, he says of the moment his mother finally named his father. By which time he was 36. He waited until he had married, transitioned from a felon to a ‘family man’ and become a father78, to have his own dad named. Still, as we talked through each hint, clue and revelation in his paternal puzzle, it seemed blood had been ‘speaking’ all along.

First, he told me of a woman, Verdun, whose bar in Newtown he frequented during his crack smoking years. One night, whilst ordering a ‘step-up’ (local cocktail of ginger wine and spiced rum),

She ask me who is my fada. I say I doh know. She tell me she going and tell me who is my fada! Black Joe dat is my fada!... So I tell her now, ‘people tell me that already, but it is not so’

Though Scratchie denied it, Verdun claimed his stout bow-legged gait had given it away. But, despite undeniable similarities (Scratchie also shares Black Joe’s dark complexion) he adamantly rejected Verdun’s assertion. Yet, it nagged at him for weeks. Until, ‘when I go up Gwad’loup now, I question my moda. And she now, she tell me doh ask her question. And honestly, I doh furder de question. I just leave dat as is’. Thus, during his 20s blood spoke, only to be muted by filial piety.

78 This transition is explored in detail in chapter 6.
Second, he mentioned one of Black Joe’s daughters, Connie, who shared the bow-legged walk and dark skin. Growing up in the same community, people regularly thought her and Scratchie were siblings,

From since we are kids, we grow up Loubiere togeda... we calling each other broda and sista because everybody used to tek us for broda and sista... From dere de blood really start to flow.

As we spoke Scratchie’s narration refused chronology; he moved back and forth in time as each revelation cast light on past moments. It was apparent that Verdun’s claim had thrown new significance on his childhood relationship to Connie, perhaps informing this narrative sequence. Blood began to speak as far as he could discern, after Verdun’s vocalisation (even if it was denied at the time). Before Verdun it was not his place to explicitly confirm it. Not to himself; nor in his supposedly fictive sibling child-play with Connie. Even if at this early moment blood had begun to ‘flow’ (was mobilised, visible even, but not yet vocal).

Thirdly, the most significant event was a virtual introduction to Black Joe’s eldest daughter. The intervention of this senior sister - a charismatic family organiser - eventually led to Scratchie’s incorporation into their paternal lineage. He narrated it as such,

Now, we have a sister in St Thomas [US Virgin Isles] they calling Rita. So, she – Connie - told that sister about me. Now, me and that sister started speaking via MSN... Facebook didn’t really come about yet.

Connie sent a picture of Scratchie to Rita. Rita then showed the photo to their other 3 sisters in St Thomas who confirmed their physical likeness. She subsequently contacted Scratchie, who promptly purchased a webcam, ‘to know’ his sisters. After just months of being virtually (re)united, Rita and their 3 sisters ‘came down’ to Dominica for Scratchie’s wedding,
First day she come down, she staying by him [Black Joe]. She say, ‘daddy-’, she want me on deir surname. So daddy ask her, who she talking about. She tell daddy, ‘garçon ou ni la ou papau na, ca se fwe nou!’’, de boy you doh take dere, dat is our broda!

Rita’s bold interjection initially shocked her father. He claimed not to know who she meant. But she insisted, and coming together as a coalition the 4 elder daughters pressured their father recognise their brother ‘in name’,

They say ‘well, daddy ave to do it eh! Daddy ave to put him on his name, if daddy doesn’t-.’ So, I tell them it’s not me [i.e. not his place]. Dat vibes is my moda and my fada, if [in fact] all you checking is he dat is my fada.

Under pressure from his daughters their father conceded,

... Now, dat is de time, my fada showed dem ‘well, yes-‘, he and my moda had dere ting going on, you understand. And soon after, me and my mother leave and go [to]... Marie Galant [Guadeloupe]. And then I come about ... But my mother never come and tell him nuffing. So dat jus stayed so.

Black Joe invited Scratchie’s mother to his house (she resides in St Martin but was home for the wedding). After some deliberation, the mother confirmed him as Scratchie’s father. Some months later Scratchie changed from his mother’s to his father’s name; including with ‘Registry’, thus declaring his father before the state.

This sequence of events enabled Scratchie to ‘know’ his father. That is, by perceiving the ‘blood’ that had begun ‘flowing’ during childhood as Connie’s play brother; ‘speaking’ with Verdun’s interjection; and became enshrined ‘in name’/law following Rita’s intervention. However, all the while Scratchie remained respectful towards his mother, whilst still having his desire for acknowledgement from his father realised. This intricate chain of communication enabled all parties to ‘keep face’. It also offered Scratchie a sense of bilateral kinship continuity and retained amicable later-life relations between elder parents. Furthermore, it is crucial to note that the
The relationship between father and son was made possible only through the crucial familial action/networking of women (sisters and mothers) who facilitated Scratchie’s incorporation into his paternal lineage.

The serendipity of Scratchie’s narrative hinted at a numinous subtext, that mystical forces had played their part in this union of kin; although this never became explicit. That said, others shared narratives of paternal (re)unions ‘later down in life’; often in more mystical and phenomenological terms. The following tale of an elder man and daughter’s encounter with an ‘outside’ son does exactly this.

The Mystic (Re)encounter of an Elder Man, Daughter and ‘Outside’ Son

Holding a reasoning on ‘de symptom’ with some Colihaut residents, an elder Kalinago fella who was passing joined the conversation. We were debating whether ‘de symptom’ was real or a case of ‘mind over matter’. He entered that he does not require ‘de symptom’ to sense if a woman is pregnant ‘for him’, noting that when he ‘let go his water’ (ejaculates) he can just tell. Citing an extramarital fling, he spoke of sensing the woman had conceived during intercourse. He instructed her to count down ten lunar cycles (280 days), upon which ‘you must bear dat child’. And according to him, she did indeed birth a boy 9 months later. But despite him ‘claiming’ the child (‘I say, “that’s mine”’), ‘she gave de child to another person’ (thus avoiding having a married man’s baby).

Nonetheless, years later when he returned to the woman’s village with his daughter (by marriage), their experience was uncanny,

While we were waiting for transport a young man came up the road… we greet them as normal people would greet anybody, [then] walked away. My daughter looked at me and she tell me ‘Daddy, who is that young man, de stouter one dat pass dere?’ I say ‘W’hapen…you have an eye for him, nuh!’ She say, ‘No, not that I have an eye for him, but, daddy as I see de young man my blood shiver inside of me’.

He encouraged her to interpret this visceral response to the boy,
I say, ‘What would you read in dat?’ She say, ‘I dunno why it happen to me’. I say, ‘Did you feel passionate towards him?’ She say, ‘No!’ I say, ‘Haven’t I told you about a son I supposed to have?... Dat’s he! He have de same genes with you. He have de same DNA with you. That is why you feel that way with him, because de blood corresponding’.

Here physical proximity with undisclosed relatives is believed to cause cardiovascular excitement; a sensation similar to but distinguishable from sexual arousal, hence the father’s questioning. Much as Scratchie described blood ‘flowing’, here blood ‘shivered’, signalling an unacknowledged familial presence. Thus, blood ‘corresponds’, as the man put it; it communes between the subtle bodies of kin (who share ‘de same DNA’). Or as another described, ‘blood doesn’t lost’. To the contrary, according to these understandings it enables relatives to find and ‘know’ their kin. Hence, the man claimed the boy had similar feelings to his sister,

...de young man asking his broad, ‘who are dese people? Because every time my eyes fall on dese young lady’s eyes and de big gentleman, my blood shiver right inside of me’. De broda jus look at him and say, ‘your moda didn’t give you to your fada. De gentleman is your fada and de girl is your sister’. And de broda tell me later...de young man tell him dat is de time he feel comfortable and nice. ...he just feel comfortable and quiet. Everything in him dat was, you know, activated, it jus quiet down and he was good.

According to the man, this revelation of physical kinship brought a feeling of calm and the youth’s arousal subsided. The moment brought existential resolution: ‘he just feel comfortable’. He resolved what Dominicans regard as the natural impulse to ‘know’ one’s ‘true’ (biological) kin; an impulse they locate in the agentive substance of blood itself. Therefore, ‘blood speaks’ when ‘the word’ – i.e. paternal naming - has failed to incorporate a missing member into the paternal line. As this case reveals, sometimes it takes a mystical later-life meeting for the sentient body to demand that the correct father is named and paternal kin are recognised.
Conclusion

…..Who feels it knows it, Lord
I said I feel it, and I know it....


In this chapter I have explored the various ways that ‘blood speaks’, that kinship mystically reveals itself through the reproductive bodies of Dominican fathers and their kin. I opened by positing the ‘problem of paternity’ (paternity’s inherent putativity) as a universal anthropological puzzle, and the ‘name call’ (paternity assigning speech act) as the Caribbean act of ‘legitimation’ (that which ensures a child has a ‘named’ father). I gave a brief mapping of Dominican everyday reproductive understandings before proceeding to discuss three speech junctures in the male reproductive life-course; three moments when ‘blood speaks’ back to a mother’s declaration, attempting to reassign paternity. During each juncture - ‘de symptom’ in pregnancy, the ‘sit and watch’ in childhood, and ‘mystic’ encounters ‘later down in life’ - blood is perceived to ‘speak’ through the bodies of kin, offering physiological clues that mystically reveal biogenetic kinship. Each of these momentary contestations have shown that so called ‘legitimacy’ is not necessarily fixed or permanent in Dominica. Rather the *problem of paternity* can cause the question of ‘naming’ (‘social legitimation’) to resurface throughout the reproductive lifecourse of the child, without always finding definitive resolution or consensus. That said, despite a complicated politics of ‘naming’ between parents, there is an impulse on the part of children, elders and blood itself, to see that a ‘true father’ is revealed.

In closing, I feel it important to bring the issue of blood’s bodily eloquence into a broader analytic frame. Throughout, I have endeavoured to keep this chapter theoretically close to the ground, retaining fidelity to the bodily theorisations of my interlocutors. In closing, though, it seems apt to reflect on what all this says about Dominican bodily epistemology. The reproductive bodies I have discussed are ‘mindful bodies’ (Schepher-Hughes and Locke 1987). Their corporeal schemes perceive the body as self, and self as *embodied* (Csordas 1990). Such bodies are knowable not simply through examination as physical objects (Cartesian objects, subject to cognition and
biomedicine), but knowable through affective awareness, through their subjective materiality. But more than this, Dominican reproductive bodies are subtle transpersonal bodies with affects that extend sympathetically between kin – as evidenced by ‘de symptom’ and mystical encounters where ‘blood flows/shivers/corresponds/speaks’.

Yet, such mindful transpersonal bodies can only be recognised as such by those who know how to read them, or more aptly, those who know how to listen to their utterances. Here, the corporeal awareness of men who discern ła dormi, women who ‘sit and watch’ and those who encourage mystical mindfulness, can be interpreted as instantiations of what Levy-Bruhl called ‘participation’ - an openness to the enchanted connection of beings, events and persons within a social field. (in Greenwood 2009:25). The Wailers song *Who Feels it, Knows it* speaks to the validity of such subtle participatory perception. Who hears/sees/feels ‘blood speaking’, knows their kin.

In closing, the elder Kalinago man (from the last example) speaks to the need to continue cultivating this corporeal awareness and knowledge. He mentioned earlier generations of Dominicans employing such perception to observe paternity. Above I have documented the continuation of this. Yet, mentioning the example of ‘de symptom’, he cites the decline of such awareness whilst arguing its importance:

> Once a man finish [sex] with a woman he must know if she is pregnant. They must have de knowledge. Some men are so frivolous in dese matters dey don’t take de observation... It do happen [‘de symptom’], I can tell you dat. I have de experience... Now what I tell you dere is a natural thing, yeah is a mysterious thing! And people are not mindful of these things!

Whether a father searching himself for ‘de symptom’, an elder female discerning resemblances on the body of a child or the sensory experience of those who encounter their kin later in life - in each case blood speaks to those who ‘know of how to know’; to those attentive enough hear its utterances, as it brings latent kinship realities into the realm of the knowable.
Chapter 4. By the Hand of the Father:
On Paternal Provision and Deficit Norms

Introduction: Hands that Provide

That fathers are expected to provide for children is a truism of Caribbean kinship. Caribbeanists have repeatedly identified this ‘breadwinner’ function as foundational to the father’s role (RT Smith 1956; Clarke 1957; Greenfield 1966:104-5; Rodman 1971: 76; Dann 1987:57). Chevannes puts it most plainly in a summary of his Jamaican study: ‘there was total unanimity that being a good father meant providing economic support for one’s children’ (Anderson, Browne and Chevannes 1993: 16; Chevannes 1986). However, alongside this ideal of paternal provision, sit two repeatedly reported patterns: ‘matrifocality’/’male marginality’ and working-class economic scarcity. The prevailing narrative, set in motion by early functionalists (Simey 1946; Clarke 1957), goes that the male breadwinner ideal causes paternal flight/mother-centred families when situated in a post-plantation context of economic precarity.
In this chapter I endeavour to complicate this seductively simple though reductive cause-effect narrative. I posit instead a framework for making sense of how kinship ideals produce an image of fathering and discuss how men practically fare in relation to this image. Rather than a portrait of scarcity producing matricentricity and absence, what emerges is a complex and contradicted tapestry of creative paternal labour, indifferent and absconding fathers, mothers who ‘father’, and men who go beyond provision to fulfil other fatherly imperatives (‘guidance’, ‘correction’ and protection). The goal of this chapter is to highlight what men do, versus what is expected of them by the state and their child-mothers. What I discover is that the popular idea of the father in Dominica is set beyond the economic reach of most working-class men. Consequently, fathers are appraised through deficit norms: what they should be doing but are believed to be failing in. Since lofty ideals lead to deficit norms irrespective of paternal attitudes or practice, Dominican fathers are depicted as recursive failures, ever destined to fall short of local ideals. That is, unless such norms are reconfigured to consider the complexity that this chapter depicts.

Since I am concerned here with lived-realities in dialogue with norms, I elect to organise the chapter around the idioms Dominicans use to discuss what provision is and should be. Such conversations were so frequently based upon metaphorical discussion of hands, that it is important for my discussion of these issues do the same. Thus, each section elaborates a local phrase that describes what hands normatively and substantively do:

- ‘A Hand to Mout Economy’. I describe the localised conditions of economic hardship and sacrifice parents face; the contemporary micro-economic realities of parenting.
- ‘Stretching a Hand’ / Not ‘Coming With Your Hands Swinging’. I examine normative parenting ‘responsibilities’: of fathers as providers and mothers as portioners; as well as the strategies men are expected to undertake, as men, to ensure they meet such expectations and realise the providing patriarch image.
- ‘One Hand Cyah [Can’t] Clap’. I explore what happens when men fail to fulfil these ideals, reneging on their contribution to the parenting alliance; discussing two cases where mothers are left to ‘father’ their child(ren) and try to force fathers to ‘play their part’ via the court system.
- Hands that Correct, Guide and Protect. Finally, I discuss what happens when men do not abscond; featuring other normative fatherly functions that provision makes possible – guidance, discipline and protection.

I end by coming full-circle, returning to the idea of the father. I conclude that a fundamental incongruity exists between the ideal of the patriarchal pater familias (the providing, guiding,
correcting, and protecting man) and the unstable economic base which compromises this role. On this I contend that the everyday pre-eminence of a provident Father God - as *paternal imago* par excellence - manifests an unrealisable ideal of father that most men struggle to live up to.

Parenting in a ‘Hand to Mout System’

*Depw jèl, la’fan e obligé mangé.*

[Once the child’s mouth splits\(^79\) it is bound to eat]

- *Kweyol Aphorism*

The moment an infant enters the world their material needs befall either the parents who ‘made’ them, or those entrusted with their care (a granny, aunt, or *nennen* [godmother]). The imperative to meet such needs is acute and immediate (as the quote emphasises), and for most Dominicans who work hard for low pay a new ‘mouth’ in the family adds to their already heavy material load. ‘Tings crucial in de country!’ ‘Tings slow for de time!’ ‘De country haard!’ – are refrains I routinely heard Dominicans utter to themselves, to a friend, to me, to anyone who might bear witness to their daily strain in making ends. In such narratives of struggle, working-class Dominicans often refer to the broader economic conditions they inhabit as a ‘hand to mout system’. That is, an economic order intentioned by those who ‘have’\(^80\), designed (as subalterns see it) to keep them ‘[op]pressed’, surviving on a day-to-day basis and unable to accumulate savings nor materially progress in their lives (see Scott Lewis 2014: 328, on Jamaicans’ equivalent).

Despite Dominica’s agrarian base (with the widest per capita land ownership distribution in the region), the population is heavily dependent on imported foodstuffs for their sustenance. This is compounded by high fuel costs and the high taxation on imported consumer goods (e.g. clothing, electricals), as well as a general slump in foreign exchange earnings since the banana industry was decimated by WTO rulings in the late 1990s. Furthermore, since much of the working population are in agriculture, fishing, agri-processing and construction industries, mostly for domestic markets with low purchasing power, cash incomes are low and fluctuate. Thus, the cost

---

\(^79\) I.e. breathes its first breath, the umbilical cord is cut and hence demands an external food source.

\(^80\) A generic exploiter at home or abroad who profits from keeping individuals under financial ‘pressure’, ‘down pressed’, struggling to maintain themselves day-to-day.
of living is unabatingly high for most working-class Dominicans. ‘Before de end of de month [i.e. payday], I paying de bills and de money finish in my hand’, a mother of 3 who works in an aquatic supplies shop once told me, venting as many do about her daily hardship. Similarly, two Rasta friends, Sylvester (father-of-7) and his ‘partner’ Indica (father-of-1) who both shift between construction, agriculture and other available jobs, noted the difficulty of keeping materially afloat,

Indica: The work don’t steady in D/a [Dominica]. And if it do steady it’s like a slave, they does slave you! ... Yah, the money you getting is just [enough] to come back work! Jus a lickle money, lickle money. And the taxes on it again-, is just a waste of time! ...Food supposed to be cheap, it expensive!... [And] you talking about clothing and ting, we don’t even talk about dat yet!

Star: More expense again! You cannot even buy a shirt to put on you. If you done pay your bills, you cannot buy food to put in your house.

Indica: It’s just the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer!

And this is even before any mention of children. Hence, as soon as ‘the child’s mouth splits’ a father or mother must fathom how the child will ‘eat’, shorthand for all aspects of their material care: how the parent will stave off hunger; provide shelter, clothe and send that child to day-care or school.

Star then highlighted the daily financial puzzle he and his common-law wife face in feeding their children, as well as paying bus fare and ‘snack’ for recess,

Tonight, we make a little supper for dem, tomorrow we brokes, we can’t send dem to school. Tomorrow morning dat is my issue, how you sending dem school? Coz no money, no luck, you check what I telling you. [It is] so dem man want to see you!

Thus, being materially ‘pressed’ by the economic order (and those perceived to profit from it, generically referred to as ‘them man’) leads to ‘pressure’ (stress) on the head of the parent(s). The individual(s) who take(s) on the responsibility of raising a child, will in turn ‘burst their brains’ as they search out solutions to meet the imminent needs of the child(ren) under their care.

81 The same idiom used in chapter 2 concerning the stress of a heartbreak. Here it refers to ‘wracking one’s brains’ to find a solution to one’s material woes as a parent.
For middle-class Dominicans who work in the public, (eco)tourism and private sectors, salaries are higher and things are somewhat easier. Nonetheless, I heard police officers and teachers routinely complain that their wages barely surpass the cost of basic amenities. For example, I vividly recall a policeman in the magistrate’s court sharing his struggle to make ends meet with one of the clerks before the day’s proceedings. ‘Cost of living passing your salary. How you can keep up?!’ the man asked rhetorically, inviting the empathy of his nodding colleague as he listed-off his outgoings: utility bills, school fees, house rent, lay-away appliance bills and so on. ‘I gwuayéying. I struggling. I tiyaad’, he concluded.

_Gwuayé_ literally translates as to ‘scratch’ or ‘scrape’; to just about make a living. But to _gwuayé_ is more than this, in Dominica’s predominantly Christian society it is the personal cross that each individual bears, the battle against hardship that they wage and endure, throughout the exigency of their mortal lives. _Gwuayé_ is one’s struggle to keep out ‘the elements’, as one father put it; to keep hunger and nature at bay. Further, one’s _gwuayé_ contributes to their individual respect, character and experience of the world; and surviving such hardship is a central feature of many parent’s self-narratives. When I first met the single-mother of two teenage boys I coached, who works for meagre wages as a newspaper clerk and receives little support from her ‘soulard’ (drunk) fisherman child-father, one of the first things she mentioned was her material strain as a mother. ‘I go through my _gwuayé_ with dem children’, she revealed proudly as she drew her cigarette. Her words attested to the daily defiance of their survival.

Therefore, the point to take here is that the macro-economic conditions of the island, when viewed at the level of the micro-social, take the form of a ‘hand to mouth system’ in Dominicans’ economic schemata. Central to each personal scheme is the defiant individual self who sacrificially confronts hardship in the interest of their child. Hence, once mouths ‘split’, parent’s heads and hands must work to find ways to feed children. And when resources are quickly depleted, then the precarious cycle continues, parent labouring ‘hand-to-mout’ to keeping out ‘the elements’ and ensuring their child’s wellbeing.

This notwithstanding, it is important to also note how normative parental roles differ between mother and father with regards to meeting children’s material needs. It is to this differentiation and its expectations that I now turn.
'Stretching a Hand'

To ‘stretch’ or ‘extend a hand’ refers to the act of giving provision, whether in cash or kind (agricultural produce, household goods or gifts). In everyday parlance fathers’ hands are normatively depicted as those that provide, or ‘maintain for the family’, as one father described. Mothers’ hands, by contrast, are expected to purchase, process and portion such provision. That is, shop, sew, launder, cook and feed. So, whether cohabiting or living-apart, parent’s hands are expected to work cooperatively, as conduits of material care. This is referred to as mother and father ‘playing their part’ or ‘holding their end’ (continuing the hand symbolism). In practice, there is much pragmatic flexibility between parental roles and the function of their hands is interchangeable (as I demonstrate below for women who both ‘mother and father’; and elaborate with regards to caring practice in chapter 5). Nevertheless, it is important to consider how parenting is materially delineated, for this reveals much of how ‘child-mothers’, the society at large and men themselves conceive of what fathering is, and should be.

For dedicated dads work is intimately tied to their sense of selves as men and fathers. In this vein, the fathers I came to know conceived of their labour as inalienable from the provisioning hands that perform it. This is because ‘maintenance’, the fruit of human labour, creates bonds between themselves and their children - whom it clothes, feeds and sends to school. At minimum, paternal ‘maintenance’ suggests recognition of the child as ‘the man’s own’ (his biological progeny82) or expresses affect for a mother he ‘is loving’83, thus making him beau pé (‘boyfriend-father’) to her child. On the other hand, ‘maintenance’ at its most meaningful shows dedication to that child.

Concerning such dedication, one June weekday in 2013 I went to ‘check’ Scratchie before work. Entering the gate, I was surprised to see him cleaning the yard (a weekend activity). He told me he had been suspended from work for fighting with a colleague. He ruefully explained what had occurred, beginning by referring to his children,

I love dem to de max-, my kids, my children, family. They’re my life. And I almost took from them something generous for de past time. Praise god it turned out how it turned out, [but] I almost took from them something very valuable. Which means: I’m employed, I

82 For elaboration on this see chapter 4.
83 See model of conjugal forms on p. 53.
Scratchie’s reference to his work began with the mention of his children, those he sees himself as working for. Integral to his employment is his capacity to express love towards his children through his wage. Therefore, central to his idea of fatherhood is being employed and thus able to ensure his family’s material wellbeing.

Both Scratchie and his wife, Cyrilla, routinely commented on how hard it was to support four children and a grandchild. However, Cyrilla was more focused on their outgoings. As manager of their family finances she was mainly interested in ends meeting and bills being paid than the significance of her labour/wage. Were Cyrilla to lose her job it would be equally difficult in material terms, but less detrimental to her sense of fulfilment as a mother and woman. As a father by contrast, Scratchie was far more occupied with his ability to provide and more invested in the symbolic significance of provision to his parental role.

Fathering then, is made through the symbolic significance of maintenance. Thus, uncles (Gonzales [1969] 1980: 60) or foster fathers (Hosein 2007: 3-4) who provide may come to be addressed as ‘father’ or ‘daddy’. Equally, the beau pé, a mother’s boyfriend who materially supports her children across a sustained period, may eventually come to be called ‘daddy’, recognised as a father by her child (once he is not abusive or excessively authoritarian). In such cases I noticed a nominal distinction between the affectionate name ‘daddy’, for the providing ‘step-father’ and the impersonal ‘my father’, for the biological father who did not ‘play his part’. So, when I asked Scratchie why his step-daughter calls him ‘daddy’, he replied, ‘well is me she know as fada from the time I come in dere life, eh’. He elaborated that ‘as fada’ he paid her ‘school fee’ and paid household bills throughout her upbringing. ‘Is me she grow with’, he concluded. This contrasted to her birth father who hardly ‘checked her’ materially or otherwise, once he and Cyrilla parted ways. ‘Love the cat; take the kittens’, the local proverb states, underpinning the responsibility of a man to ‘take on’ the children of a woman he is ‘loving’ (see Brown et al 1993: 9, 12). Whilst it must be noted that there is more to ‘growing with’ a father/step-father than maintenance (see ‘guidance’, ‘correction’ and protection below and everyday care in chapter 5); provision is emphasised as paramount in fathers’ and their adoptive children’s accounts of becoming kin.
A man’s capacity to provide is not only his primary preoccupation when taking on a step-child, but also when discovering a woman is pregnant ‘for him’. For example, learning he would become a father, 23-year-old scuba assistant, Bob, who earns EC$60 (£15) a day and lives ‘at his moda home’, sought counsel from his friend Maxi about his money woes. A father-of-one on good terms with his ‘child-mother’, Maxi’s response to Bob’s questions about the high cost of ‘Pampers’ and ‘formula’ was simple: ‘tie your waist my boy!’ That is, prepare for having less money than you once did: spend on kids instead of peers; sewo (party) less; and be weary of ‘friends’ (male and female) who only appear when ‘you have’ (money). In sum, prepare for the austerity of paternal responsibility. Sylvester described his entry into fatherhood in terms of a similar priority shift,

I used to go dance, I used to go action [parties], I used to go all about. Since I start making my chil’ren I stop go places I not supposed to be. At my home I have to be with my children at all times and my woman once I finish hustle my scene [making money]. [Because] no money no love, so it be in de country.

In short, a man is expected to ‘play stooch’ (frugal) amongst his peers, give up ‘liming’ (which diverts familial funds) and financially prioritise his children (and woman if he has one), once he becomes a father. ‘No money no love’, he concludes of the harsh reality of paternal responsibility in a context where funds are scarce and cannot afford to be wasted. Provision expresses love and affords its reciprocity.

A corollary of financial responsibility is occupational creativity. Low-income fathers understand that they must become economically wily, improvising new occupational opportunities so as to provide in Dominica’s ‘hand to mout system’. This perspective is shared by a female magistrate (introduced below) who told a man brought to court for maintenance arrears, ‘you need to step up... get a skill, get a trade or do a training so that you can maintain your child.... Love need to have a lickle finance too’. Again, love, labour and ‘maintenance’ are closely associated; love motivating the creative pursuit of the work, which generates ‘maintenance’. In addition to finding a trade and skills training, other occupational routes including fishing, ‘planting’ (fruits, vegetables, spices, marijuana), launching a small business (e.g. a bar or ‘snackette’), investing in livestock, finding formal employment, ‘making movements’ (drug trafficking) and labour migration are also variably pursued by working-class fathers. An openness to such opportunities and willingness to shift between them is widely valued throughout the Caribbean; documented regionally as

Whilst I saw mothers demonstrating such occupational flair in meeting children’s basic needs, and routinely exceeded fathers in the extent of their toil, men nonetheless placed great significance on the dynamism of their labour. This is likely the outcome of everyday patriarchal discourses which disregard women’s income generating work (see Maurer 1991 on Dominica) and reinforce ideals of masculinity and femininity which valorise income-generating craft in men (economic production), as opposed to creative transformational and portioning skills amongst women (economic reproduction). Hence, Auntie’s stories of baking cakes to sell at her workplace and crocheting doilies for sale at market, both to buy toiletries and foodstuffs to send for her daughter studying in Cuba, received little recognition beyond her close family and friends. By contrast, the men I came to know, lauded male peers who were bwiggant; energetic, industrious and ‘busy’ in pursuit of opportunity. Similarly, fathers who demonstrated ‘tekni k’ (improvised skill) across a range of manual occupations, each in which he excelled, earned great respect from their friends and family (see Wilson 1973 on multiplicity as ‘reputation’ enhancer).

In this regard, elder dad Mr Pierre, spoke fondly of his father who did various occupations to meet the family’s needs: ‘To call my father a “Jack of all trades” is to put it glibly; ‘He was something of an artist, he worked very skilfully with his hands...Whatever was available to him he did’. Pierre’s father was a baker, kept a provision garden, reared livestock, was a fisherman, a stevedore at Portsmouth harbour, and was a fine craftsman of traditional bamboo ‘fish pots’ (submarine fishing baskets). Looking back through young eyes, Pierre reflected to me, ‘My father was my hero, but I didn’t know what that was yet. I would follow him everywhere he would let me. To my mind, he was the best at everything’: catching the biggest fish, harvesting the biggest dasheen, the best traditional bélé dancer and harmonica player in the village. And even after the terrible day when his father’s arm was hashéd (severed) by a cutlass wielding neighbour during a fight that spilled into their yard, his father ‘continued to do all his work’ (gardening, fishing, baking). All of this was done in collaboration with his mother; who ran the family shop, co-managed the bakery and organised the daily affairs of their homestead. Concerning the latter, he declared, ‘my mother was the best economist I’ve ever heard of. She could turn one shilling into a meal for the entire family’.
Pierre’s parents resembled the normative profile of the father who provisions and mother who processes and portions. However, like Auntie’s and countless other women, Pierre’s mother will have undoubtedly practiced occupational creativity (between their shop, bakery and garden) thus contributing provision in her own right. Yet, Pierre did not mention her productive labour outright. He praised her as ‘a remarkable mother’ by emphasising her budgeting and portioning skills; leaving her dynamic provisioning to be inferred. By contrast, even where one of his father’s provisioning hands was severed, Valerie continued to extol his dad’s productive labour. This is not to criticise Mr Pierre (a stay-at-home father whose wife ‘maintains’ their household) for his narrative simply reflects norms that have endured from his parents’ era to the present. Such norms, spoken in terms of the provisioning hand of the father and portioning hand of the mother, continue today to be framed as each party ‘holding their end’ in the parenting alliance. Pierre concluded his narrative by underlining his parents’ unwavering sense of sacrifice towards their parenting, ‘My parents practiced self-denial as a religion...their whole life was dedicated to their children’. This shared purpose and duty, each parent ‘playing their part’, albeit in gendered ways, also offered a sense of parenting parity.

In the following section I discuss cases where such role parity is seen by mothers to be lacking and explore what happens when fathers renege on the paternal imperative to provide.

‘One Hand Cyah Clap’

This proverb points to the economic necessity of parental cooperation for raising children in Dominica – two providing hands working in unison. Put another way, ‘one hand cyah [can’t] clap’ communicates the difficulty of one parent providing on their own. In this section I present the cases of three single mothers who are forced to provide for children without paternal support. First, I present their perspectives on why the fathers of their children fail to provide; next, I discuss the significance of their frustrations, as mothers who ‘father’; finally, I explore how they turn to the Dominican state to step in and ‘tie’ renegade fathers into their economic function.

Fathers who renege: reasons for relinquishing responsibility

A man who cannot adequately provide for his child(ren) often feels a sense of paternal inadequacy. This is to be expected given the gendered significance of provision. In instances
where a ‘child-father’ lives apart from mother and child he is expected not to arrive ‘with his two hand swinging by his side’ (empty handed). To do so is to provoke the question: ‘what you come dere for?’, from a mother hard-pressed by the financial strain of raising children without paternal support. Hence, the father with negligible income, whose relations with a child mother have deteriorated or who simply does not acknowledge his child, will rather renege than face the shame of attending his child-mother’s without ‘stretching a hand’. Whilst these are a few of my observations as to why certain men do not materially support their children, mothers I spoke with had further interpretations.

The most common reason given by mothers and other observers (e.g. kin, neighbours) for fathers not providing, was the breakdown of the romantic and sexual relation between the parents. It is commonly understood that maintenance is tied to sexual favour in the minds of men, and as such, when two parents are no longer ‘loving’84 (or if they never were), a man’s resources are often re-directed away from a mother and child. Emphasising this point, Sharon, single-mother of four in her 30s noted,

As far as the children, they [two of her three child-fathers] show no concern, you know. Seriously, they show no concern. Is like dey doh care, ‘I doh have de mother, I doh need de child’.

This is the inverse of the ‘love the cat take the kittens’ logic. So, when conjugal affections wilt or splinter, children are often ‘set free’, disregarded by their fathers.

Nonetheless, a father who leaves his children outright ‘to suffer’ in the absence of his support is considered a ‘wotless’ (worthless) man. Hence, he must provide some ancillary reason beyond no longer loving the child-mother. One logic amongst such fathers is that their child-mother has a new lover, and so this lover should rightfully support the mother-child dyad (as Beau pé), hence, relieving the biological father of responsibility. For example, a father in the magistrate’s court once explained his not maintaining his son by simply stating, ‘he [the child] is calling somebody else daddy and not me!’ So not only was another man providing for the mother, and by extension the

84 For a breakdown of conjugal idioms see Fig 12 (p.66).
child, but was also answering to ‘daddy’. So, for ‘the birth father’ this other man had entirely occupied the paternal function, absolving him of any responsibility.

Similarly, when a father finds a new lover, goes on to have additional children or begins to support his new lover’s children, his provision for his pre-existing ‘outside children’ often wanes (Stycos and Back 1964). Sharon again, this time speaking of her youngest daughter’s father: ‘Shanille father, soon as we break up that was it, wii! But before we start break, things start to change already. He [has] got too many responsibilities’. By ‘responsibilities’ Sharon alluded to his assistance of his ageing mother85, as well as the more recent addition of his fiancé. Hence, a father may opt to ‘forget his child’ of a soured previous relationship as he prioritises and disperses his provision amongst a network composed of his lover, her dependents and his consanguines.

Towards the end of our conversation Sharon concluded of her child-fathers, ‘It’s like if you with them, you, standing as a mother, you stand a better chance’. Consequently, whilst ‘loving’ the father of her child does not guarantee adequate maintenance from a child father, it is believed to stand her in greater stead to receive something.

Further to a mother’s new lover or father’s additional responsibilities, another ancillary argument is often advanced: father’s claim that the child is ‘surviving’ without his provision and hence the latter is not needed. On many occasions, fathers I asked about children they do not provide for responded with the consolatory claim, ‘I know they are not starving’ or ‘I know they will be ok’; confident that the mother would/could meet their material needs. Once I recall a young father’s cunning claim that he had strategically selected his well-off white ‘French’ (Guadeloupian) girlfriend as a child mother for this would enable his child to escape poverty, ensure he would not have to pay school fees (covered by the French state) and be free of future maintenance obligations (covered by her well-off family). Therefore, some fathers absolve their responsibility to ‘extend a hand’ (provision they would have to work hard to come by in the ‘hand to mouth’ economy) by convincing themselves that their support is not necessary since the child’s material wellbeing is already being met by the mother, her kin or her lover. This brings me to Cilla’s story.

85 Clarke (1957: 123) engages in an extended discussion of the imperative of the son to reciprocally provide for his mother who sacrificed so much for her children once he has come of age, thus underlining the regional economic importance of the mother-son relationship.
Cilla is the mother of two boys I coached at a local football academy. She works for a modest wage at a small office in town. The boys’ father is a middle-class man who ‘never give them a button’ until she took him to court for maintenance. Now he only ‘pays for his children’ sporadically (drawing up high court arrears). One day, when I was observing court proceedings Cilla’s case was called. Later I saw her in the street and she told me about her encounter with her ‘child-fada’ near the courtroom

So this morning we outside sit down dere, he come and tell me oh, he is not worried about de children because he know de children are not starving. I said, ‘How do you know dey are not starving? Are you feeding dem?’. He said, ‘Well, I know you will always take care of de children’. I say, ‘So dat is your excuse? You know something, get away from dere’. He say, ‘You need to understand, I know they are alright, I know they are alright!’ ‘That’s not the point. Where is your responsibility?’

Hence, such fathers abate guilt and sidestep responsibilities assigned to them by assuring themselves that their children are being supported by someone else. This leaves mothers with the burden of meeting children’s material needs through their own income and support from friends, kin and lovers. At the end of their exchange Cilla appealed to her child-father’s moral conscience. Like her own individual gwuaye, which extends from her maternal sense of obligation, Cilla reminds her child father that he has abandoned his paternal duty. However, as she informed me this is not the first time she has appealed to his personal conscience, usually to little effect. Interpreting this episode and the various explanations of why men renege on provision, one must examine how parental obligation is conceived of differently by mothers and fathers. Maternal obligations are typically naturalised and taken for granted; mothers are scathingly commented on if they abscond on their duties to care for or house a child with kin (granny, nennen, aunt) or a friend; whilst it seems paternal duty is something fathers regard as optative, contingent on relations to a child mother, her current conjugal status and the father’s whim. Hence, it is unsurprising that child-mothers often get ‘vex’ with the mere mention of an absconding child-father’s name.
The frustrations of ‘mothers who ’father’: when one hand is expected to clap

I think of Dominican woman as strong. And maybe I shouldn’t say it but the pattern of family life makes for that... nobody thinks anything of it really. And I think as a result, I think women have learned to be father and mother.

- Eugenia ‘Mamo’ Charles, former Dominican prime minister

[It is] hard keeping up with everything: school shoe, you have school book, you have school fee, you have Christmas, you have everything-, snack, everything! I guess that put me to realise I’m going to be depending on myself.

- Sharon, Mother of 4, Loubiere

When I first I met Hermia, a short-haired mother of ten in her 40s, she was putting out rubbish for an elderly couple she worked for. Introduced by a neighbour, she asked if I was a ‘Peace Corps’ volunteer, to which I explained I was researching Dominican fatherhood. ‘Dominica has fathers, nuh?’; she returned ironically, insinuating their island-wide absence. I asked what she meant. Her answer was brusque, ‘Men in Dominica are bags of rubbish!’ With this she tossed the bin bag she was carrying towards the road and headed inside. Some months later when speaking with her eldest son, he mentioned that he hardly knows his father, a Dominican man who lives in America. This man does not ‘check’ him, he tells me. ‘You know my mudda?’ I nod. ‘Well, she is mudda and father!’

Though some of her children live with their fathers, some overseas and others with kin elsewhere ‘on island’, during my time in Dominica I glimpsed Hermia labouring tirelessly to meet the needs of her 5 co-residing children. I saw her ‘hustling’ [rushing] between her provision garden, fishing from her boat with the village fishermen, opening a small wooden bar and getting a job in an agricultural supplies store in town. Once aware of her experience of toiling by herself for her children, Hermia’s comments about Dominican fathers began to made sense. As did her son’s. His reference to her as a mother who ‘fathers’ evoked the familiar profile of the resilient single mother

86 The only fisherwoman I ever observed and only the second I heard of in all my time in Dominica (the other, a Colihaut woman who fished alone with a line from the rocks, not with the village fishermen as Hermia did).
which recurs in the region’s ethnographic, literary and popular imaginations (see Senior 1991; Rahim 2011). The son’s words, like those of many Dominicans I met, echoed Lamming’s protagonist in his novel *Season of Adventure* (1953: 11), who famously asserted, ‘My father who had only fathered the idea of me left me the sole liability of my mother who really fathered me’. (This passage inspired the title of Clarke’s classic 1957 ethnography, *My Mother Who Fathered Me*). At first glance it is tempting to romanticise Hermia’s resilience and economic dynamism, her simultaneous mothering and ‘fathering’, as a kind of ‘hermaphroditic heroism’ (Rahim 2011). Yet, this would be to miss the more sobering daily realities of her gwuayé.

Equally, this is not to claim that ‘mothers have never and do not today “father” children’ as Lazarus-Black (1995) concluded. Rather, I observed that many Dominican mothers do ‘father’ their children, in *practical terms*, because countless Dominicans say that they do. That is, Caribbean mothers, by force of paternal abdication, often fulfil the normative provider role of the father (Sobo 1993: 149; Mulot 2000). Mothers do not become fathers (as Lazarus-Black suggests this would imply), but as the testimonies of my Dominican interlocutors suggests, they do, without choice, inhabit the paternal function. However, Dominican mothers themselves deem this state of things problematic. Not as an objection to any gender transgression, for women have laboured, provided, and engaged in multiplicity as well as other non-normative practices (Besson 1993) since the plantation. Rather than objecting to doing men’s parental work *per se*, what mothers object to is being left to do *all the work* of parenting. Thus, maintenance as a metonym for ‘fathering’, when added to the extensive labour of mothering (detailed in chapter 5), places an excessive burden on many mothers.

For this reason, and for want of parity, the gesture of a father’s material contribution and recognition of her labour, women take their ‘child-fathers’ to maintenance court. Or as one exhausted single-mother simply proclaimed before the magistrate as justification for her maintenance claim: ‘*Toute baggie, se mwen!*’ (I have to do everything).

*Mothers, Men and the Maintenance Court*

That’s all you got. If he won’t give you a dollar to buy a pound of sugar, the law says that you can go there and they can make him.... You got to go do it. I never had a fear of that.

- Cilla, Mother of 3
The ‘maintenance court’ functions to legally ‘tie’ men into fathering and paternal provision; particularly, where naming a father (chapter 3) or love for a mother (chapter 2) have failed. Mother, father and magistrate (as state representative), each have their own agendas in such maintenance cases. I will elaborate on each of these in turn, after first summarising the general pattern of court proceedings.

When a mother ‘carries’ a case to court for alimony she first files the ‘complaint’ in the Roseau court office and receives a court date. Next the bailiff travels to the village, neighbourhood or workplace of the man to ‘serve’ him the ‘court paper’. In some cases, the man may have made himself scarce upon hearing of the bailiff’s arrival. Where the latter is unable to ‘serve’ him, a cat-and-mouse-like pursuit ensues between the court and the man. On the summoned date if the father does not appear the magistrate will ask the mother (frustrated with ‘walking up and down to court’) for the nickname of the man, to better find him (with the aid of a police escort and warrant). When both mother and putative father are present in court the complaint can be read under the Maintenance Act (1990, 35:61). Here, the charismatic magistrate, who translates between folk kinship idioms and legal jargon (sometimes code-switching into kreyol where necessary, a truly reformist practice in a post-colonial courtroom) will ask the mother whether the father has been ‘maintaining his child’. The father is then also asked whether, and if so how (in cash, clothing, food) and how often, he ‘maintains the child’. Here the magistrate often gives either party the platform to cathartically ‘vent’, a performative moment for their version of events to be aired in the courtroom (more on this below), before restoring order, sometimes assisted by the two resident police officers. Should a father deny paternity, then the magistrate must ascertain putative paternity. To do so the mother, purported father and any witnesses they call are invited to testify their versions of the events that led to conception. Unless the father presents undeniable evidence to contest the mother’s claim (including a EC$1000 paternity test, though men seldom choose this option) the man is usually ascribed as putative father. Thereafter, the magistrate asks how much he is willing to pay to maintain ‘his child’, appealing to his sense of generosity and goading him to pay more if his suggestion is deemed insufficient (‘nah man, that is too low!’). The magistrate then asks about his employment status, work role and current outgoings. Following this, a judgement is made between a contribution of EC$35 (approx. £8.50; the magistrate’s lower threshold) and EC$75 per child per week (approx. £18; the legal limit). This is based on what she
determines his means and the needs of the child to be. Finally, the putative father is instructed to deposit the order weekly to the court office until the child is 15 years of age (18 if in full-time education or disabled). Should he fall into arrears of more than 6 weeks he is summoned back to court, whereby, if unable or unwilling to pay or keep up with a re-payment plan, he may face up to 3 months of imprisonment for ‘Bastardy Arrears’.

Each of the mothers mentioned, Hermia, Cilla and Sharon, discussed experiences of carrying a case to court. Furthermore, each week of the 14 months I spent observing maintenance court proceedings, I heard an average of 20 new and existing cases called. Although a small minority of women use the maintenance court (I would estimate 1/15 mothers), many more threaten to exercise this right and it nonetheless constitutes a familiar feature of kinship life to Dominicans (as is the case on other islands; see Lazarus-Black 1991: 119; LaFond 1996). This being true, the question remains: what motivates each party to participate in the court?

For mothers, it is firstly a matter of symbolic duty. For her child(ren) to receive existential acknowledgement from their father(s). As Priscilla asserted, ‘you got to go do it’; ‘it’ being to force a child-father to regard his progeny before the state; and ‘extend a hand’ to them as a gesture of such regard. Secondly, for the mother herself not only is material support much needed; but fulfilling her right to stand up in court, to ‘vent’, share her maternal gwuayé and be granted a maintenance order represents a form of kinship justice (Lazarus-Black 1991: 119). However, I would not suggest that a mother’s justice necessarily comes through the fathers ‘ritual shaming’ (Lazarus-Black 1991). Rather, it is the father, brought to court by force, who often perceives the process to be an intentional humiliation by an embittered ex-lover (even if this was far from the mother’s intention). ‘She have a grudge against me’, one father blurted to the magistrate during his child-mother’s testimony; whilst others like Cilla’s child father accused her of ‘hating’ him. Hence, mothers typically pursue ‘justice’ not through shaming but though the state recognising a lack of parenting parity between the mother who ‘fathers’ and the father who does not ‘hold his end’. Consequentially, justice is realised via the state ordering that the man materially ‘checks’ (sees to the wellbeing of) his child.

For the state on the other hand, paternal maintenance is viewed structurally as a matter of national concern with implications for the country’s ‘development’. Middle-class anxieties about Dominica as an island bereft of adequate fathers, tend to associate paternal absence with child
poverty (due to a lack of maintenance), as well as youth ‘delinquency’, criminality and teen pregnancy (due to a lack of paternal ‘correction’ and protection; see below). As Mr Cuffy, a police inspector, contended,

In my view fathers have spectacularly failed the family structure... Hence, you see family dysfunctionalism; you see family absenteeism as well, with respect to fathers. Although, they are in the country but they’re not there and some of them who are there indeed are not there, because they are not executing their functions.

Therefore, the maintenance courts operate as the primary site of state intervention in family relations, working to see that fathers adequately ‘execute their functions’. And, sharing a common-sense conception of society which has an uncanny structural functionalist87 ring to it, many stalwarts of the respectable social order (magistrates, government ministers, senior police officers) hold that enforcing paternal maintenance, and ‘responsibility’ more generally, will cure a host of social ills. However, given that the maintenance court is grossly under-resourced – with long waiting times, difficulty enforcing that fathers pay and long outstanding OECS88 recommendations to establish a fully-fledged Dominican family court, it is no surprise that the current facility does not effect widespread social change; if indeed it could with such conditions in place. (For an elaboration on this see the Conclusion chapter).

Nonetheless, common opinion amongst many fathers I spoke with was that the incumbent magistrate, a committed advocate of paternal involvement and child rights, has, since beginning her tenure (in 2001) enforced a stricter policy towards absconding fathers than her predecessors. During her sessions, she also admonishes fathers to take a more active everyday interest in their children's lives, beyond solely maintenance. ‘Doh forget her, de child is part of you’, I distinctly recall her telling one father; and ‘check your child, nuh man!’, she instructed countless others, reminding them to think of and maintain contact with their children. Likewise, once the court has ordered a father to ‘pay for his child’, the magistrate also urges mothers to grant fathers access to their children, thus enabling them to fulfil the other imperatives of fathering - ‘correction’,

87 Uncanny but far from surprising given the extent to which early functionalist accounts of Caribbean kinship were funded with colonial administration and policy outcomes in mind (e.g. Simey 1946, Clarke 1957, Blake 1961).
88 The Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States.
guidance and protection. Her words to one mother underscore the perceived society-wide benefit of these norms: ‘please help the country by helping a father to see his child’.

In the final section I elaborate the three core features of fathering - ‘correction’, guidance and protection - that provision opens the way to.

Hands that ‘correct’, guide and protect: paternal inculcations and guardianship

What I have noticed is when fathers would perhaps bring some monetary contribution they think that is it…. That cannot be it! There’s a lot more; love has to be extended to the child, [s/he] has to be sculpted, you know. And marked and crafted in such a way to develop the child, to make that child become a good citizen, you know. For the socioeconomic development of our country.

(Inspector Cuffy, late 50s)

Once again invoking the paternal significance of hands, Cuffy, a police officer and stern advocate of discipline, contends that not simply provision but also ‘sculpting’, ‘crafting’ and ‘marking’ children, leading them ‘on the right path’, are also key to fathering. Whilst provision renders such functions enactable, for him provision alone is insufficient. To ‘stand as a father’ means also to become a model of good values/behaviour, a final arbiter of familial discipline (Wilson 1973) and a protector from ‘negative elements in society’. Such views were not only held by senior advocates of respectability, but were shared by mothers of diverse backgrounds and many fathers too. These are norms which if not realisable by all parents were certainly by most supported as ideals.

And, since children are considered by Dominicans to be naturally ‘wayward’, rambunctious and porous to the influence of ‘bad friend’; fathers are charged with seeing that their children are not ‘led astray’. This is to avoid being labelled with any of the denigrating epithets an observer may use to describe a misbehaving child who is seen to lack paternal cultivation and discipline. These include terms like: mal pop (badly brought up, rude, ill mannered), mal kassé (‘badly broken’, like an undisciplined horse), neg mawon (maroon, an escaped slave, rebellious and itinerant), kawante (‘vagabond’, also indiscipline and itinerant). Although degradingly bourgeois, racialized and colonial in origin, such terms have been inherited by ‘lower-class’ folk and are used society-wide in everyday parlance. They are also linked to a region-wide bourgeois notion that ‘lower-
class’ mother-centred families are somehow deficient with regards to child guidance, discipline and protection, since they are lacking fathers to stand as their patriarchal heads. Therefore, since prevailing local logic associates a lack of paternal inculcation with wayward youth, it is essential to briefly discuss what such inculcation normatively entails for fathers who are an active presence in their children’s lives.

‘Correction’

Adom: What is the hardest thing about being a father?

Bryon: To me it’s like disciplining, eh. Growing up the child properly, eh!

Bryon is a father-of-one whose son lives with him and his wife. Like many Dominican fathers Bryon emphasised discipline as a fundamental parenting challenge. I observed that mothers mete out most daily scolding and ‘correction’ of children (typically through threats of corporal punishment rather than actual force; see Wilson 1973: 126-7). Fathers, on the other hand, are the final arbiters of familial discipline, figures of potential fear expected to mete out punishment via ‘lashings’ with a slipper, belt, bundled newspaper or anything at hand. The trans-Caribbean maternal threat, ‘see if you don’t behave, when your father come he will beat you’ (Wilson 1973; Lazarus-Black 1991) reveals that ‘far from being an expendable figure whose frequent absence causes little concern, the father is seen to play a unique role for which women do not feel suited’, as Blake writes of Jamaica (1961: 73). This unique role is as the ‘enforcer’ of correction, as one stern yet loving elder father phrased it whilst reminiscing on his children’s upbringing.

This disciplinary role is informed by the widely cited aphorism, ‘spare the rod, spoil the child’, which frames corporeal punishment as a moral duty to the child, based on their apparently innate disorderliness and need of sternly inculcated discipline. Marlon, a divorced librarian and father of twins, spoke with me at length about the importance of parental discipline. He grew up in a large yet poor nuclear family with a hardworking mother and ‘absent-present’ (coresident yet emotionally remote) father who took little interest in his 8 children. His mother did all the ‘correction’. Acutely aware of the father he wanted to become, Marlon stressed his ‘responsibility’ to ‘correct’ his children,
A lack of discipline is what spoils the child... you find children seems to go astray faster [than adults], especially boys... [Without discipline a] child will become a negative element in our society.

He continued, ‘I don’t make [i.e. let] children manipulate me’. Parenting is seen here as a power relation whereby an authoritative tension between father and child keeps the child, particularly a boy child, from straying. As Sharon, who both ‘mothers and fathers’ noted of her youngest daughter, ‘I doh spoil her. Once you make her fink she can do what she want, you lost her’. Thus, many parents actively resist the urge to overindulge their child with affection.

Furthermore, the Guyanese proverb, ‘tie the heifer, lose the bull’ (Browne, J. and Chevannes, B. 2001: 30), also aptly describes Dominican parenting, whereby the movement of girl children – who are considered sexually vulnerable to male advances - is more militantly policed than that of boys89, and usually undertaken by a mother. Typically, fathers are more lenient on girls, by contrast to boys who are given freedom to roam but forcefully disciplined by fathers if caught stealing, being disrespectful or for some other infraction (e.g. shirking yard work). The idea here is that boys need hardening and are at once more hardy so ‘can tek it’. Thus, the disciplinary hands of fathers, work out of responsibility to correct boy and girl children in differing intensities.

Nevertheless, some fathers find the bogeyman role an emotionally difficult one to fulfil. For example, towards the end of our interview Marlon affirmed the necessity of correction before issuing the caveat, ‘even if you beat and have to close the door and weep in the room’. For him, beating was for the child’s ‘own good’ and thus the parent should persevere in correcting a child whilst concealing the pain its delivery causes them. Furthermore, I remember chairing a CariMAN fathers group at a Roseau girl’s school where 7 middle-class men spoke with myself and a Dominican social worker, about everyday matters that concerned them as dads. One key issue was discipline, specifically mothers’ reliance on them to enforce it in hard measure. ‘Automatically he [the father] becomes the jumbie [an evil spirit]’ one father protested; with another adding, ‘I

89 For a prime instance of such sexual policing see the online beating of her daughter by Barbadian mum Helen Burnette, in a video of which went ‘viral’ sparking debate on social media throughout the region and its diaspora. Online Stable URL: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2613651/Shocking-video-Caribbean-mother-brutally-whipping-daughter-12-belt-posing-semi-nude-Facebook-goes-viral.html [Accessed 10/10/15]
feel your pain, you become the bad-john’. In short, contemporary Dominican fathers dutifully follow their disciplinarian role although some often find it emotionally difficult to enact.

Guidance

Alongside ‘correction’ through corporeal punishment is nonphysical fatherly guidance; showing children ‘de right path’. Fathers are often stern and quiet towards their children, communicating with them often only through brief and court directives in specific activities (running errands, doing chores etc). Although some fathers do ‘reason’ (engage philosophic, political or moral dialogue) with their children (particularly those I discuss in chapter 5 who are becoming increasingly demonstrative), for the most part guidance operates through performative example. My former landlord Mr Pinard, conveyed this position of many fathers during an interview, noting that ‘children learn from what they see’. Therefore, committed fathers often endeavour to act as a template of hard work, honesty, moral principle, generosity and strength for their children (much as Mr Pierre described his father, above).

In some instances, mothers spoke highly of exemplary fathers who realised such promise. For example, Bonti, a CariMAN member, warmly recalled his father, who, although away in the UK for 30 years as a factory worker, was spoken of by Bonti’s mother as a ‘man amongst men’. ‘The most amazing thing about it’, remembered Bonti,

he was one who snow, rain, [workers’] strike, whatever, regularly my mother would receive a registered letter in the mail. It was as if he had not gone anywhere. Once a month the children would receive their letter from him.... And my mother would receive her stipend... and it was re-li-gious, until he came [home]... All the way in England and how he treated us, he had to be a first-class father and a first-class husband for my mother to tell me, and tell us, ‘your father, he is a man amongst men’.

Unlike many fathers of that era who emigrated, eventually stopped sending remittances and started new families, Bonti’s father was ‘out of state but still in mind’ (Seller 2005). His consistent letters, provision and his wife’s comments about his character, etched in his children’s minds his commitment to family, and cast him as a strong example to them. Therefore, provision not only opened the way to guidance by example, but through the very principle of consistent and dependable provision from afar, it represented such example, in and of itself.
For others, the art of maintaining a pristine paternal persona as a guiding template to one’s children can prove tricky. The Abrahamic image of the father as spiritual director of the procreative family is widespread in Dominica. In the island’s 3 main belief systems - Christianity, Rastafari and Islam - patriarchal doctrine holds that that men are expected to take the spiritual lead in family Bible study and present a model of spiritual living to their children. Yet, many mothers often express frustration that men are less devoted to church than females (male elders excluded). Cyrilla, Scratchie’s wife lamented on many occasions, her husband’s disinclination to regularly attend church, lead the family in Bible study or give up marijuana which, she claims, ‘blocks god’s blessings’ to their family. In conversation with me one Sunday on men’s relationship to Christianity, she stated,

god loves a spiritual man... because a man’s job is to be de head of de home in all forms. To be de head of devotion. You supposed to be the pillar and your wife under you. But the way you find it is, most of the time the most spiritual person [is the wife], like she have to always be at her husband ... In de Bible it was always de men – Abraham, Moses. But in dis world, it's de women. De men like de secular world.

She was alluding to her husband Scratchie, who led her to the Pentecostal church as he sought to leave ‘the secular life’, yet visibly struggled, like many men, to live up to high Christian ideals set before him as a father. However, he now smokes in the locked toilet (the only private space in the house), disguising the scent with incense and he attends service on special holidays. In this he is finding his way towards compromise between the life to which is accustomed and a life of trying to guide his family in faith, as his wife expects of him. Thus, the ideal of the father as familial faith leader often proves difficult for even the most committed fathers to fulfil.

Protection

Dominican fathers often articulated the importance of warding-off dangers to their children’s safety as integral to their role. Generally, this includes all risks to a child’s wellbeing, though parents are acutely sensitive to the risk of sexual abuse from adults and general threats to adolescent girls from teenage boys and men. The issue of child sexual abuse is not a new one, and is discussed region wide as a phenomenon caused by poverty and single mother households. The prevailing logic here is that paternal absence denies children protection and provision. This in
turn leads mothers to overlook the ‘assistance’ that age-inappropriate sexual relations\(^9\) between daughters and older men brings them. The most commonly repeated local reports concerned bus drivers who had engaged in clandestine relations with schoolgirls that take their route, granting them free rides, cell phones and cash in return for ‘favour’ (sexual relations). These longstanding concerns are now accompanied by emerging public discourse around the paedophilia risks of boy children (a group not traditionally regarded as sexually vulnerable). Both have been informed by a growing regional child protection agenda which impact local lives through the work of local NGOs (e.g. Child Fund Dominica), television awareness raising adverts, documentaries, radio discussions and an ongoing campaign in Dominica to raise the age of consent to 18 (Dominica News Online, January 2010).

For many individual fathers the mandate to protect children from sexual abuse is routinely expressed through a kind of protective verbal warning-shot men issue when sitting or standing around with peers. The warning is an indirectly fired threat to no one and anyone, all at the same time; it serves to strike fear into any person who would attempt to ‘go behind’ (sexually advance on) their child. For example, I recall during my first interview with Scratchie being struck by one such blanket threat as he suddenly shifted from discussing prison to his children,

... I ain’t goin and go back to prison... Well, actually, right now I have kids.... You play with my kids, you don’t have an excuse, there’s no explanation you can gimme to satisfy me. If you play wiv my kids; coz my kids are who I’m living for. My kids, my wife, that’s my family, that’s who I chose to be wiv and I will protect them by any means necessary.

A common motif within such protective narratives is a cool willingness to face prison or have onlookers ‘sen police for me’ in the interest of protecting one’s child. This statement, and others like it, declare a symbolic field around a child by investing the reputation of a father in their protection. Thus, any harm done unto the child is symbolically enacted unto the father who will be expected to reciprocate in kind.

\(^9\) Deemed as such by respectable adult observers (see Dominica News Online, February 2016) but less so by the participants themselves – especially men, for whom markedly less regulation of sexual behaviour is expected than women.
Conversely, instead of a threat, some fathers will cite their children as the only justifiable reason, within the remit of his masculine pride, to avoid a confrontation (and such confrontations routinely end in ‘blows’, ‘bottle’, coo waash ['a big stone'] or a cutlass). For example, father of twins, Cleve, reflected after a fight with a fella on ‘the block’ one Saturday, that half way through the fight (involving thrown stones and bottles) ‘I remember I have two children... that self I tell you, he lucky I have children. For me to get 7 years in prison?!’ To this one young man playfully added (of his five-year-old daughters), ‘... by the time you come out they have boyfriend, there’s Jeep outside the house, they coming up to the prison to tell you they gettin marry! Hahaha’. So, whilst the idea of sexual advances towards daughters results in violent threats to ward them off, equally such violence is also often avoided, in practice, out of concern that this would also undermine a father’s ability to protect his daughters whilst incarcerated (including vetting boyfriends). Hence, protective a priori intimidations and post-hoc justifications enable a speaking father to maintain his safeguarding stance towards his daughter(s) without damaging his pride or having to resort to physical violence.

Finally, a father’s protection of his child may come not only in the face of human predation but also natural or supernatural hazard. Indeed, Dominican custom holds that dreams offer portentous guides and symbols that signal future events. Therefore, when Scratchie awoke one Saturday morning following a vivid dream in which a dilapidated house had fallen and crushed his first-born daughter who was playing within, he awoke with a clear mission. He rounded up a few ‘partners’ from the village and told them the content of his premonition. Sympathising with his re-retelling and the urgency of his plight, they helped him to demolish the building that afternoon, thus avoiding the threat it posed to his daughter and averting the imminent tragedy that his dream had foretold. Thus, paternal protection also takes cues from the subtle realm to ensure the wellbeing of one’s child.
Conclusion. Fathering Beyond Reach: Father God and The Problem of Deficit
Norm-making

But now Lord, thou art our Father; we are the clay, and thou our potter, we all are the work of thy hand

(Isiah, 64:8)

In this chapter I have explored how fathering is figured through various fundamental ideas. Ordering my argument around the everyday hand idioms with which Dominicans frame fathering, I first discussed the rich significance of provision and then elaborated on the other normative features of fathering that it renders possible – correction, guidance and protection. Throughout, the idea of the father as familial patriarch, a Caribbean pater familias, has emerged. However, as will have also become apparent there are many instances in which fathers struggle in a ‘hand to mouth economy’ or find reasons not to fulfill their duties. As I have shown, this often provokes a quarrel with child mothers who have been left ‘to father’ children, sometimes resulting in a maintenance court order.

Having structured the chapter around an everyday poetic conjuncture, between fathers’ hands and provision, it makes sense to close with another. This time between the idea of the father and that of God. Throughout their daily activities, trials and tribulations Dominicans routinely address god to fulfill everyday needs. ‘Oh, Father help me’, a grandmother will say in exhaustion, overwhelmed by ceaselessness work; ‘yes fada’, a young man who meets another on the street may say as a greeting to a friend, an acknowledgement of divine presence within his ‘partner’; ‘papa Jah will provide’, a friend will say to hearten a mother in a time of hardship; and an elder man may seek ‘guidance and protection from the almighty fada’ during the vulnerable twilight years of his life. Thus, papa bondyé (father God) is a nearby presence in people’s daily lives. He represents a provident and benevolent God, whose wrath ‘God fearing’ Dominicans also fear should they ‘backslide’ (relapse into ‘bad ways’). Therefore, the image of the divine father and the ideal of the mortal father – as provider, disciplinarian, guardian and guide, bear a distinct resemblance with one-another.
However, rather than speak of God in terms of ‘the paternal metaphor’, interpreting this resemblance as a ‘prototype effect’ (Shapiro 2008: 138) whereby father God is named after the ideal mortal father. Instead, I suggest that the Dominican idea of the mortal father is modelled upon the image and example of the divine. Fathers made in God’s image. *The myth of the dead father* I discussed in the introduction contended that the plantation symbolically killed the black father in the early Plantation-Americas. In fact, what it did was to promote narrowly accessible images of fathering whilst simultaneously consolidating a monotheistic image of the almighty father. Therefore, from the post-emancipation era into the present, rank and file Caribbeans modelled fathering, in part, on the elite patriarch, *massa*, he with the material means and authority to enact normative fathering, and the almighty God - a father familiar to all. Fast forward to the contemporary moment, it is no surprise that the image of the mortal father, which informs mothers’ and children’s expectations of their fathers, is too often out of step with the real-world fathers they encounter. This creates a problem, a quarrel; and fathers often drift from elusive norms placed before them. Such fathers often walk away from a concept of fathering which is already beyond reach or hard to sustain in a ‘hand to mouth’ economy. Hence, what is witnessed here is a model of Caribbean fathering defined by what I called *deficit norm making* - fathering defined not by what men do but what they should do, yet fail to. Therefore, to bring fathering into reach, short of an economic boom, would be to meet fathers somewhere between where they are and where they are expected to be. In other words, this is as Auntie often advises, to ‘take the good to cover the bad’; to tease out the redeeming modes through which fathers realise local norms; to take these as the basis for striking a compromise between the idea of the divine father,
the ideal for mortal fathers and the actions of the real Dominican men who have featured in this chapter.
Chapter 5. Being Seen to Care:

Men’s Silences and the Emerging Visibilities of Intimate Fatherhood

The core of the father’s role is to support the child financially and not to be close to him/her emotionally.

‘We have a problem here in Dominica, our men doh like to take care of deir chilren’, a single mother in her 40s told me during my first month in Dominica. Similar statements were routinely shared by women and men of various ages throughout fieldwork; including a few months later by a mother in a hair salon. ‘But what about all the fathers I see picking up their children from school, walking them home hand-in-hand? So they doh care about their children, then?!’, I asked this
mother, thinking of all the men I had sighted in public with their children. She paused, appearing confused. ‘Care, like check their chil’ren, nuh!?’ she reiterated (‘checking’ meaning material support). On reflection, I realise we were transacting two different models of fatherly care: hers a hegemonic local notion of paternal provision as care; mine an imported, though increasingly Dominican, concept of care as demonstrative and intimate quotidian labour.

This chapter explores the complicated relationship between these two notions of care. I suggest that both are in everyday circulation in Dominica, yet, each is verbalised or hushed by particular groups, in particular contexts. Hence, working and middle-class fathers emphasise their material care and silence their intimate care amongst their peers; at the same time working-class mums in need of material support play-down their ‘child-father’s’ intimate paternal care; social workers, family organisations and middle-class mothers promote a more hands-on paternal commitment which they believe to be lacking amongst the masses via campaigns and daily discourse; and finally, fathers of all backgrounds are beginning to promote their paternal proximity via social media.

In what follows, I pull out the numerous strands of this complex nexus of pronounced, silenced and emergent paternal care. To do so, I:

(1) Outline local parenting norms, the models of masculinity they reinforce and how these are often contradicted by observable everyday practices. These elements present the context of paternal care: the expected division of parental labour, how this is informed by gendered ideals, and who contributes what in terms of everyday childrearing.

(2) Discuss the masculine silences this context produces with regards to the intimate model of care. I examine how patriarchal images of masculine personhood reinforce specific paternal silences and vocalities.

(3) Show the dissonance between these silences and the increasing public visibility of paternal labour. I contend that public education, popular media and return migration are producing a progressively more observable paternal proximity.

(4) I document what this loving proximity looks like in daily practice, documenting my observations of quotidian kin acts and their evident yet unspoken significance for a growing minority of fathers and their children.
And (5), conclude with a discussion of an emergent cosmopolitan phenomenon where fathers are visually documenting and sharing their caring interactions with children via social media. Here I argue that these fathers are finding burgeoning descriptive voice for their care, and in the process demanding a broader imagining of Caribbean paternal care.

Initially, I had been inspired to explore what Carsten called ‘the close-up, intimate and experiential dimension of kinship’ (2004: 9); and what Notermans (2008) termed ‘the everyday emotional world of kinship’ amongst Dominican men. However, at first this proved methodologically tricky, for I had inappropriately pursued fathering through ‘the word’, unaware that men had a limited vocabulary to answer the kinds of questions I was posing about their daily care. Hence, this chapter also deals with the methodological difficulties of enquiry into the mundane and affecting dimensions of kinship through the interview medium - especially, where masculinity mutes such aspects. I present here a case for observant participation and attention to alternate sources such as social media, for seeing the everyday affects of fathering. Furthermore, I situate these first-hand observations in relation to public education documents, campaign materials and popular cultural images that have informed the intimate re-imagining of fathering in recent Caribbean history.

Before I continue, a caveat: what I am presenting here is not a revolutionary shift in Caribbean parenting practice. Rather, I suggest that the hands-on care of many fathers is publicly concealed by patriarchal expectations. Throughout my months in Dominica I observed that many fathers routinely engaged in this intimate form of parental labour. It is difficult to estimate the proportion of fathers undertaking such care and the frequency with which they do so, at home (cooking, bathing, dressing) and in public (school runs, outings), due to their diversity of circumstances (living situation, form of care, sporadic nature of contact). Nonetheless, of all the 29 middle and working-class fathers I observed in this area, 14 regularly undertook such care (3 times a week or more). That said, mothers still fulfilled the bulk of parental labour in these cases; and my sample is perhaps skewed by the fact that less active father’s practice was difficult to observe (so such fathers do not feature here). Nevertheless, this small but significant cohort of silently caring fathers caught my ethnographic attention as their daily practice contradicted popular discourses around fatherly absence and a lack of care.

---

91 These are the quotidian affects and practices of kinship, rather than the classificatory (formal) and structural renderings that had dominated kinship studies throughout anthropology’s history.
Next, some context on pre-existing gendered parenting ideals and everyday practices, to offer a background against which to discern the silences, emergent visibilities and burgeoning vocalities I discuss.

**Gendered Parenting Ideals and Practices**

The popular idea of provision as paternal care which opened this chapter extends from a normative local division of labour between parents (introduced in the previous chapter). This division occurs between fathers charged with ‘extending a hand’ (financially) and mothers expected to undertake the daily bulk of childrearing (or find fathers, aunts, grandmothers or foster mothers to do so). This division is normalised and naturalised. Such ‘mothers work’, as it is termed, involves cooking, bathing, dressing, laundering clothes and household budgeting (Lazarus-Black 1995). But more than this, Dominican mothers are not only expected to undertake such practical ‘caregiving’ but also to ‘care’ (Wozniak 2002:9) - to express emotional concern with their children’s wellbeing, whereabouts and futures. Conversely, paternal care is normatively more hands-off.

Provision constitutes a loving gesture and opens the way for paternal interventions in the form of correction, protection and guidance (as also argued in chapter 4). Thus, ideals of fatherly care are less a matter of continuous emotional and domiciliary labour to meet quotidian need; and more concerned with intermittent intervention occasioned by specific material requirements (e.g. school fees) and orientating a child to the outside world.

That said, middle-class Caribbean mothers, expressing longstanding concerns at their husbands’ apparent lack of commitment to the idea of the nuclear family (Alexander 1977), are beginning to expect their men’s intimate and emotional ‘investment’ in family life (Freeman 2014). This trend reflects my observations of Dominica, where a cousin and her girlfriend, both married to prominent businessmen, often expressed concern that their husbands did not ‘help out enough’ with the children and were too often out ‘liming’. Such frustrations, and the expectations of ‘emotional investment’ underpinning them were less apparent amongst working-class mothers, who by contrast, were far more preoccupied with receiving (economic) ‘assistance’ in meeting their children’s basic needs. Indeed, the active participation of ‘child-fathers’ in everyday childrearing was far less of an explicit priority. (This is not to say they were not involved, only there was less expectation for them to be).
The heteronormative model of parental care expressed by working-class folk, and for the most part middle-class men, is closely bound to gendered notions of personhood. What is seen to make a proper man or woman mediates the norms and practice of parenthood. Provision is deeply embedded in the idea of masculinity and fatherhood. What Blake (1961) noted of Jamaican men, I found to be true of their Dominican counterparts today: fathers’ ‘ideal self-image appears to be that of a responsible patriarch’; a coresident or ‘visiting’ household head who yields respect as reciprocity for provision, and who administers direction and discipline with avowed benevolence. This cross-class hegemon endures today. Likewise, for mothers of all classes the quotidian sacrifice of raising children and ensuring they ‘grow properly’ - become respectful, successful, even – also enhances their statuses as women. In short, parenting ideals exist in dialogue with ideals of female and male personhood.

Concerning the actual practice of parental labour, most mothers take on the bulk of everyday work to reproduce households and children. The following impressionistic sketch of daily caring labour is modelled on one of my industrious neighbours. Yet, I observed a similar trend to be common amongst cohabiting working parents island-wide. This includes the mother waking as early as 5am before work to prepare the day’s lunch (typically ‘ground provision’: plantain, yam, dasheen; and meat or fish). She makes breakfast for a co-resident spouse/boyfriend, children and grandchildren, then heads to work for 8am. Mothers who farm often wake earlier. She may then return after midday to serve and eat lunch, before returning to work after an hour. After work, finishing at 4pm, mothers often ‘press clothes’ (iron), hand-squeeze juice or clean fish for the following day. On weekends, she may wash the entire family’s clothes and tend to her garden. By contrast, her man’s labour consists of a day’s work to earn a wage, to contribute to the family; returning to tend/feed animals (chickens that provide eggs; rabbits that provide meat) and feed dogs (which protect). Once such jobs are finished, he may relax as his spouse/girlfriend continues to work in the kitchen. During such periods, he may play with children, sleep, watch TV or go out. This sketch represents a hegemonic co-residential norm; the father that features here would be regarded as responsible patriarch and the woman a dutiful mother. In cases were the father is not co-resident, a mother might expect to fulfil much of the paternal role too (unless a son/grandfather/uncle/brother does), as mentioned in the previous chapter.

I offer this concise depiction of paternal and maternal labour for I see these practices as reflective of typical household and parenting trends in Dominica; where a mothers’ kin work is extensive and
routinely crosscuts the ideals of mother and father, whilst a father’s usually sits within the discrete bounds of what is expected of him. Most working people imagine care within these parameters: paternal care as mainly material; mothers’ as everything else.

In the remainder of this chapter I explore a small though burgeoning number of working-class fathers’ nurturant parenting, which extends into areas considered the domain of mothering. In their non-normativity these practices are not acknowledged. Deemed neither good nor bad, they reside outside of the perceptible remit of working-class fathering. And with this they are silenced by patriarchal ideals for they also sit beyond acknowledgement as contributing to masculine personhood. However, I argue, such working men’s intimate parenting remains silent at the same time as middle-class and foreign images of hands-on fathering abound. Silence and visibility, existing in contrapuntal relation, like a conversation where two parties are talking past each other about the same thing (Reisman 1974).

In the following section I explore paternal silences and how they confounded my early fieldwork; before examining the emerging paternal visibilities – images of middle-class men and practices of working-class men – that these silences conceal.

Encountering Silences

‘In the rain and sun Bernard is in the construction work, nobody knows what he is thinking’

- Bernard, retired builder, aged 70

This grandfather’s words, spoken in an alienated third person, allude to the silences that often veil men’s interior worlds of sentiment from their kin. In her paternal memoir, Mr Potter, Kincaid refers to this hidden emotional landscape as ‘the many interstices of Mr Potter’s heart’ (2002: 152), the spaces between words and conscious reflection where Kincaid searches for paternal feeling towards Potters abandoned children. My task in this section is like Kincaid’s, yet it illustrates my attempts to ethnographically uncover and understand paternal silence amongst visibly involved fathers. But first, I discuss the role of masculine ideals in this muting of paternal affects.

Concerning Silences and When Men Talk

To say that ‘men don’t talk’ is to recite a local cliché. As I would learn, the intimate and affecting dimensions of fathering are areas of life Dominican men seldom discuss. However, the cliché is
misleading for its lack of specificity. *Men do talk* about particular things: about politics, sport, sex, automobiles, religion and work, argues Lewis; and they do so using various indirect registers: humour, parables, boasting, insults and advice (Lewis 2007). Conversely, family life is an area Caribbean men give notably less discursive attention, and which is primarily spoken about with regards to the impacts of income, occupational status and employment on male selfhood (Lewis 2007). In Dominica, I heard men speak about fathering in specific ways and contexts. Some talked extensively of the life-creating acts that produce children (see chapter 3); others waxed lyrical about their child’s academic achievements or sporting successes; and a few complained of acrimonious relations with child-mothers or the hardships of child maintenance. But, rarely did they speak amongst peers or womenfolk of their feelings concerning their children (e.g. affections or worries), time spent together, or the small acts of daily care (bathing, ‘combing’, braiding hair, cooking) which a sizeable minority of co-resident fathers, and a few live-apart fathers, routinely undertake. These more mundane acts were so everyday that often mothers did not remark on them either, unless commenting during their practical undertaking (e.g. discussion of hair-braiding styles) or listing one’s daily activities. Men, by contrast would undertake such practices in silence, or rarely announce them in their schedule. Although most fathers, when pressed, told me unequivocally that they love their children, they also rarely found words to elaborate such feelings beyond affirming normative commitments to protect or provide for children. In short, most men’s intimate paternal practice affirmed the cliché; everyday care was simply undertaken, without description or explicit reflection.

I observed that men do not speak about such practices because they are without a discursive register to do so. Rutherford has described these as ‘men’s silences’ – a result of the ‘disjuncture between lived experience and available vocabularies’ that often occurs when men enter gender non-normative realms of practice (1992: 11). Since men gain little esteem for their caring labour, popularly identified as ‘women’s work’ (Brown et al 1993: 198), it is thus effectively a non-act. Neither an explicit responsibility or something normatively expected, but something done silently, out of a personal sense of duty to contribute to a household, parenting alliance, or to meet a child’s needs. In this respect, intimately involved Caribbean fathers are discursively ‘muted’ (Ardener 2005: 51) by masculine norms and gendered models of care (outlined above), which

---

92 Writing on her late husband’s theory of ‘muted groups’ Shirley Ardener notes, ‘Edwin always maintained
preclude the discussion of many paternal practices and affects. Herein, men seem to lack the
certainty with which women speak on kinship; with patriarchal ideology positing women as
naturalised mothers and kinship experts, whilst dumbing-down men’s sense of practical kinship
knowledge.

Interestingly, many working and lower-middle-class fathers, whose ‘work-home-work-home’
routine brings them into close contact with their children, are referred to as ‘quiet’ men. This
model of masculinity is not the middle-class ‘big man’ profile (the hegemonic ideal), nor the flashy
working-class ‘boasterman’ or the ‘weak’ maco (of chapter 2). Rather, he who embodies a ‘quiet
man’ persona is considered modest, disciplined and dedicated to his work and family. Such men,
deemed ‘quiet’ with regards to valorised masculine qualities (e.g. charismatic ‘big talk’ or
conspicuous materialism), are often equally quiet vis-à-vis their everyday caring practices. This is
evident in two interviews - one I attempted, one I completed - with nurturant, ‘quiet’ fathers. Here
I reflect on the silences these interviews revealed.

Two Interviews

Butterfish

Butterfish is a father-of-five in his 40s. After a few months of living with Scratchie’s family I started
seeing him seated alone outside his girlfriend Connie’s house on ‘Backstreet’ (down the hill from
Scratchie and Cyrilla’s yard). Eventually we struck up conversation. I told him of my research and
football coaching with local youth, and it transpired that I coach his two young sons, who he
returns from America for three months a year to visit - ‘I come back for my boys, man’. ‘I don’t
have to be there [i.e. Dominica], you know’, he quickly reminded, informing me of his Green Card
and the construction work awaiting him in the US. However, he told me he chooses the
responsibility of a family life and providing for their future. Like many of the more active fathers I
spoke with, he emphasised his opting into his paternal duties – coming home to Dominica, seeing
his sons, building their house extension, and forfeiting ‘liming’ with friends – all in terms of choice

That muted group theory was not only, or even primarily, about women – although women comprised a
conspicuous case in point... he also drew on his personal experience as a sensitive (intellectual) boy among
hearty (sportive) boys in an all-boys London secondary school’ (2005: 51). Hence, muting also occurs for
non-hegemonic masculine expression; including self-muting.
and sacrifice rather than an obligation. It was his choice to care – in normative terms (providing and protecting) - as a father.

In the final month of his visit I saw him walking hand-in-hand with his sons, dropping them to football and bringing them to an evening team fundraiser. The boys could also be seen riding on a new plastic car, on the savannah in new football boots he had ‘brought down’ for them, or moving around the village with a puppy they had nagged him for. The mutual affect between father and sons was obvious. Butterfish expressed this materially by ‘spoiling’ his sons with gifts and with small acts of everyday care - such as ensuring their safe movement through the village\textsuperscript{93}. Yet, he only reflected in conversation on the material dimensions of his fatherly care, never any mention of time simply spent together or his dutiful movement with them.

One Thursday after Christmas I passed their freshly painted house\textsuperscript{94}. Butterfish was inside in a convivial mood and invited me for a whiskey and Christmas cake. As we drank he spoke proudly of sailing on cruise ships to far flung Vanuatu, America and Australia as a provision master (‘a hard work, man!’); shared the biography of his nickname, ‘Butterfish’ (‘when you pass from America to cross the pacific they giving everybody the name of a fish’); and of his now retired alias, ‘Rooster’ (‘Rooster was women business. I finish wid dat man... I am a fada now’). As we spoke, I glanced at the time to realise I was late for football. ‘We need to go through the whole history’, I asserted, throwing back my drink. ‘Of course! I dere for a little while, man’, he replied. I suggested I return the next morning ‘around ten’ for an interview and he agreed. The following morning at ten their door was unusually closed. I called him from the step. No reply. I called again and waited. ‘Who dat dere?’, a voice jolted through the door. ‘Is Adom, I come and check you about the interview vibes on your life and becoming a fada and thing’. Silence. Then, ‘I tired, man’, he grumbled, ‘come back another time’. ‘Ok, no problem’, I replied, then ambled back up the hill.

Initially, I presumed I had overstepped the burgeoning trust and boundaries of our friendship by prying into his family life. But, days before his departure when I encountered him on the road I realised trust was not the issue. We stood watching the traffic. He mentioned his suspicion

\textsuperscript{93} By contrast to most boys of their ages (5 and 9) who are allowed to walk short distances around the village with a sibling or for the elder one, alone.

\textsuperscript{94} Dominicans traditionally carry out housing renovations such as painting, replacing roofing sheets and fixing fences at Christmas time (as is true of Trinidad, Miller 1994). Here Butterfish had painted the house as per his male household role.
towards members of the neighbourhood, asserting ‘I don’t really talk with people, you know. You will mostly see me by myself’. Indeed, I had observed that amongst men of his age associations begin to wither and only a few close dependable friendships were maintained. To my surprise he then added, ‘You alone I does really pull up and talk to in the village’.

Though I will never definitively know why he did not answer the door, it seems that perhaps his giving up ‘woman business’ and taking on material responsibilities were the only aspects of fathering he felt comfortable to vocalise in casual conversation (even with a friend), and these he framed as a caring sacrifice. The sacrifice was his trading in a lauded ‘dan dada’ ('Rooster') profile for that of the ‘quiet man’ (a father and ‘old man’) a concession he could, speak on. But my attempt to hone-in on the intimate details of his fathering was to penetrate a realm of private kin practice which, if not ‘a secret to himself’ (Kincaid 2002), was perceived as so unremarkable that my interest in it was confusing, discomforting even. Thus, Butterfish possessed a selective vocality on his paternal affects and practices, which afforded discussion of certain features of his fathering whilst entirely precluding others. Perhaps the very idea of the interview, represented an intrusion into sensitive psychic ground.

Mr Scotland

With Mr Scotland, a policeman and 59-year-old grandfather, the opposite of Butterfish’s attempted interview occurred. Not only did a discussion take place, in fact it was far more disclosing than perhaps either of us had imagined. He shared his love for his children, relationship to his wife, his career in the police, and the personal meaning of his emotional closeness to his two grandsons (‘is they I am living for’). As we wrapped-up the interview, he looked up across the wooden desk in his office and commented,

That’s the first time I opened up to-, I’m not a great speaker. I’m not a person that would just open out to-, it’s probably the first time I’m doing that. Le’me tell you, I’ve interviewed maybe hundreds and hundreds of people... But it’s the first time I’ve been on the other end.

Mr Scotland and I lived nearby one-another. Prior to the interview we had not met95 but afterwards I would regularly see him carrying his sleeping grandsons to the car as I passed his

---

95 His daughter, a neighbourhood acquaintance, had introduced us after mentioning him as a wonderful
house; or would hail his silver Nissan as he drove home along the coastal road. I always tried to show regard as we passed. To convey my deep respect for him, and the reflections he had so honestly narrated to me. I could tell he had drawn his responses to my questions from the depths of himself. But, perhaps for this reason, when we did re-encounter one-another in the street, our meetings felt awkward. My questions had coaxed him from the realm of surface-level male interaction to bring out his interior sentiments and memories. In a sense, I realise now that I had disarmed him of the silence that so often sits beneath male humour, parables, banter and even anger; a silence which offers a protective armour against the vulnerability of intimate disclosures. Now we did not seem to know how to approach one another on the roadside. We were attempting to commune, as acquaintances typically do, through light conversation; but beneath our interchanges sat a quiet knowing of the other; an unequal knowing - my knowledge of his feelings for his most beloved kin and his everyday private interactions with them. Though I had assured him that I would treat this information with strict anonymity (I use a pseudonym here), it seems the very act of unveiling his previously unspoken feelings was to expose a site of potential weakness to the outside world in which we later met.

I once asked Simon, a young Kalinago (‘Carib’) father, why men so often fell silent when I asked them about fathering. His reply was straightforward,

Yeah man, it’s not like you have to bring out your family business to your friends, you know. What happen home, stay home, [with] your family. When you pull up with your friends you chat about something else.

It was obvious once it had been said: Dominican men socialise in and inhabit ‘outside’ spaces (roadsides, workplaces, bars), yet for a man to ‘bring out his family business’ in such public spaces is to expose the privacy of his home life, with all its potential stresses and vulnerabilities, to peers who may later ridicule him. Whilst I do not think Mr Scotland believed I was going to betray his trust, I think the experience was nonetheless unfamiliar and disarming for this reason.

* * * * * * *
Fathering is frequently unsettling since men are typically unaccustomed to complex affective, relational upbringing and the profound depth of feelings not easily put into words that are evoked by their children.

-Diamond 1998: 246

Reflecting on these 2 interviews – one characterised by the avoidance of discomfort (Butterfish), the other by discomfort following over-disclosure (Scotland) – I can see that my questioning scratched at silences imposed by masculine norms. Norms which afford paternal intimacy little public value, significance or noteworthiness. Pursuing descriptions of fatherly intimacies and their affects through ‘the word’ – let alone in the staged format of the interview – provoked visible unease in my interlocutors. And even where words could be found, prevailing modes of male sociality had difficulty accommodating the disclosures and the vulnerabilities the interview divulged.

Most of the Dominican fathers that feature here observably experienced the kinds of affects Scotland discussed, but they often remain implicit and pre-articulate. There simply are. They are experienced, felt, and even observable, but cannot be said. Intimate paternal practice can be aptly described as an ‘imponderable’ feature of Caribbean kinship. ‘Imponderabilia’ being,

...a series of phenomena of great importance which cannot possibly be recorded by questioning or computing documents, but have to be observed in their full actuality....

Here belong such things as the routine of a [wo]man’s working day, the details of his care of the body, of the manner of taking food and preparing it... (Malinowski 2002 [1922]: 18).

The details of bodily care, feeding and other patterns of caring labour to meet a child’s needs were instantiations of silent fathering I observed many times in Dominica. Towards the end of the chapter, I turn to observation and description of everyday life to make sense of working-class men’s nurturant paternal practices, ‘in their full actuality’. But first, some recent historical context on the emerging public visibility of fatherhood in Dominica more generally – from middle-class, foreign and emigrant sources. These provide a backdrop for the dominant culture’s representational reimagining of Caribbean fathering, against which I position working men’s muted practices.
Emerging Visibilities

The Public Appearance of Fatherhood

‘You see this whole concept of father-hood... this whole community assessment of fatherhood - it’s something extremely recent. We’re talking about the last 30 years maybe. This whole concept of social education, public education related to this-, I mean before you didn’t discuss those things. It’s just [that] you didn’t have a discussion of them in relation to the media or anything like that, you see...’

- Lennon Honychurch, Dominican historian

According to local observers, an image of fathers as providers, guides, disciplinarians and protectors has long existed in Dominica. But fatherhood, as something a man embraces or rejects as a matter of identity, and for which he is publicly appraised, this is altogether new. Dominican observers suggest this reconfiguration occurred towards the late 1970s. Barrow identified it as a regional shift, calling it a ‘cultural reconfiguration of fatherhood’ - a change from ‘the traditional version of breadwinner and authority figure to a more rounded role with a daily involvement in care and communication’ (2010: 137). To accept this claim is not to say that fathers were not demonstrably affectionate towards their children before the late 70s. Based on the recollections of elders with whom I spoke on the subject, I would suggest that instead of not existing before this time, perhaps nurturant fathering simply was not visible in the public domain (hence closed to public scrutiny). Thus, Mona, a grandmother and youth group leader born in the 1930s recalled of her childhood,

My very first memories of life were on my father’s knee. And he’d be smoking his pipe and talking. And my ear would be somewhere on his chest... and his voice would be reverberating throughout my ear. And that is how I would fall asleep at night. Every night.

Intimate paternal memories were not unusual amongst elders who grew up in the early to mid-20th century. Such micro-histories are largely hidden from record behind popular narratives of fathers of this era as distant figures who were not noted to take a hands-on role in their children’s lives, as many elders also recalled. Interactions like Mona’s were largely concealed in the private domain. As Mrs LeTouche, a grandmother and retired headmistress recollected, ‘before, you would never see a man walking with his child, holding his child, on the bus with his child. Men simply didn’t do such things’. These three middle-class elders (historian, retired teacher, youth
leader), are social observers whose standpoints\textsuperscript{96} offered a diachronic, albeit partial, view of intimate fatherhood’s Dominican emergence. Whilst, each is a situated perspective they nonetheless offer some historical depth to my synchronic ethnographic observations. In short, they had lived through the transformations they described.

The latter 1970s saw a concerted push by governments and family planning agencies across the Caribbean for increased paternal involvement in family life. Malthusian concerns with population pressure on islands with small resource bases, low foreign exchange and high import dependencies centred ‘family planning’ as developmental priority for newly independent Caribbean states\textsuperscript{97}. Inheriting the structural functionalist logic of colonial social science (e.g. Simey 1946) and its policy agendas (see Putnam 2014), national administrators viewed ‘the family’ as a ‘basic unit’ of governance. For such administrators, resolving the pathologies of the family (‘illegitimacy’, ‘promiscuity’, ‘irresponsibility’, ‘absent’ fathers and single mothers) would alleviate numerous social ills (‘delinquency’, criminality, material deprivation and violence). Such concerns aligned with similar anxieties amongst the respectable middle-classes and church leaders towards ‘lower-class men who sire unsupported children (Barrow 2001). Fathers thought to fit this profile were targeted in a push to ‘bring them in’ to the family fold; to support their children and act as patriarchal guides and disciplinarians. But not only this, such longstanding social agendas were married with an emerging international dissemination of a softer, more emotional engaged and demonstrative image of the father – the ideal of the ‘new father’ (as it was becoming known across the North Atlantic).

In Dominica, these messages were presented to the public by The Dominica Planned Parenthood Association\textsuperscript{98} (DPPA) \textit{via} posters in municipal buildings, clinics and educational establishments. Some presented emotive images of abandoned children and ‘child-mothers’; others shamed abscondent fathers. They aimed to appeal to fathers’ moral consciences, imploring them to present themselves in financial, emotional and bodily terms (see appendix for examples). The posters urged men to also take responsibility for reproductive planning and the ‘maintenance’ of

\textsuperscript{96} Classed, ‘respectability’-oriented and generationally positioned.

\textsuperscript{97} Such as Dominica which became formally independent in 1978.

\textsuperscript{98} Founded in 1976 DPPA is a member of the regional Caribbean Family Planning Affiliation (CFPA) and International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF). Here I share images of posters from around the Anglophone region to show the trend in its broader regional context. Such posters, or the like, would have been on display in Dominica.
children. And regarding the emotional and physical presence of fathers, in some posters there was also a push for a broader definition of care, beyond the financial. One poster of a father assisting his daughter with her homework read,

One of the nicest ways that he can show his children that he cares is by spending time with them...being there when he’s needed. Do you know what is happening in your children’s lives? Are you there when they need to be comforted...cheered... guided? Your presence could make the difference whether your child succeeds or fails (Jamaican National Family Planning Board C.1979, see fig below).

Figure 25 - ‘Here... when he’s needed’ (National Family Planning Board, Kingston Jamaica. C.1979)
Such posters targeted paternal pride, drawing a direct link between a child’s success in life (e.g. in school or sports, a father’s boasting fodder; Wilson 1973: 126) and a father’s daily presence and emotional availability. Some posters displayed guidance and support; with others representing men cradling infants. For the first time, public representations of Caribbean fatherhood, as explicitly ‘responsible’, involved, committed and demonstrably loving, were entering the public domain with the aim of engaging and transforming men. However, it is worth noting that the more attentive looking fathers appear to be middle-classed (smartly dressed, in well-furnished houses), by contrast to those that depict impoverished looking absconders (note one poster featuring a man in shoes with no laces - see appendix).

The 1980s also witnessed satellite TV’s arrival in Dominica. Although anthropologists have highlighted parents’ negative perceptions of American TV’s effects on Dominican youth (e.g. promoting violence and materialism, Quinlan and Hansen 2013; Blank 2003), some of my interlocutors contended that it might have also had a positive influence on aspects of local parenting. Representations of middle-class black family life in American films and TV (a most notable example being The Cosby Show) exported the ideal of the benevolent black nuclear patriarch - patient, strong, materially secure, of sound Christian values and most importantly, involved in his children’s lives. (This image resembles the middle-class ‘family man’ ideal discussed in chapter 6). However, since the Dominican milieu is porous to a wide array of extra-local images, objects and experiences which shape its dynamics and emerging kinship ideals, it is difficult to pin down the emulation of television figures as the source of fatherhood’s shifting local image. That said, amongst the SUV-driving middle-class fathers whose children attended a Football academy where I volunteered, I often observed an attentiveness to their children that, if not modelled upon the American TV image, certainly resembled it.

Furthermore, many of this same cohort of middle-class Dominicans also engage circular migration sojourns to the North Atlantic metropoles from which such TV shows are being broadcast; as do some working-class Dominicans who have family ‘in de foreign’. Fox (1999) has tentatively argued in her study of non-normative Jamaican fathering that perhaps metropolitan migratory experiences have informed changing embodiments of fatherhood in the Caribbean. Her informant, Richard, ‘a peaceful Rasta’ from a rural village, who cooks, cleans and assists his
daughters with their homework, spent several years in London where he witnessed a gender fluid domestic division of labour. Fox describes how Richard observed his sister and husband’s cooperative care for their children, and took up his own share of the housework. This continued back in Jamaica, where he became a more active and hands-on presence in his daughter’s and ‘baby-mother’s’ lives. Therefore, those emigrant Dominican men who encountered emerging fathering norms in Canada, the US and the UK, likely also returned with their own new imaginings of fatherhood. Equally, the steady spread of Caribbean feminism and mothers’ demands for greater paternal involvement in childrearing, may too have caused ideas to shift. Mrs LeTouche succinctly summed up this play between local transformation and the repatriation of foreign symbols: ‘we go out and we see how they do it... as time changes, things change too. The methods of living change’. Thus, circular migration and cosmopolitan exchanges often repatriate new practices to the evolving Antilles, and in time these become embedded in everyday life.

Given the silences and the diverse flows discussed thus far, it is difficult to discern one cause for men’s shifting practice. It is fair to conclude, though, that various images and experiences (family planning campaigns, television, migration and feminist consciousness) have transacted throughout the Caribbean cosmos (the region and diaspora) to provoke a collective reimagining of intimate Caribbean fatherhood. Bringing this section to bear on the previous, it seems we are confronting a paradox. Images of intimate fatherhood are increasingly present in the milieu, imported and appropriated often from above (mostly by middle-class mothers, family planners, the media and some returning emigrants), whilst working and middle-class fathers I met, continue to be without the elocutionary register to comfortably articulate their experience of such practices. A discursive dissonance between dominant society imagery and everyday practices appears to be in effect.

So, I have discussed the silences and emerging image of close paternal care in generalised ways. Next I hone in on some of the specific ways in which I have observed men’s caring for children, both in private (‘at home’) and the public domain where they have become more visible (‘outside’).
How Men Care

At Home

Cooking. Within households I was particularly intrigued by the small though significant number of co-resident fathers who do part if not all of the household cooking (8/29 men). Beaver for example, a Rasta and father-of-one lives with his common law wife and daughter. Unlike his wife, who works 8am-4pm in a shop, he is a plumber with varied working hours, meaning he can do more throughout the day at home. During the week, he prepares breakfast (eggs, salad, tea, mastiff [traditional] bread) each morning; lunch (Dominican’s main meal - typically provisions, rice, beans, with meat or fish; or pilau; or ‘broth’); and dinner is often bread and tea. He terms Saturdays ‘as the world turns’, a ‘free up’ day where he or his wife will throw something together, and eating varies according to their whim and availability. Sundays are ‘everything baked’, where his wife usually prepares a dinner of macaroni pie, stewed chicken and rice. Their household food-rhythms are inherited from Beaver’s deceased mother’s household in which (observing his mum) he learnt the rudiments of cooking, developing on them in his procreative family.

Whilst Dominicans have long acknowledged that single men of Beaver’s widower father’s generation (in his mid-60s) are proficient in preparing a ‘one pot’ or ‘broth’ when living alone and ‘making do’, as well as young men avoiding women’s ‘cutting style’ (see chapter 2); it is altogether more recent for family food-ways to be inherited by a son, and thus become his domain as a father. Such cases are relatively few: 5 out of 29 men I observed as fathers cooked most meals for their children; though significantly more cooked when a wife, girlfriend, grandmother or aunt was temporarily unavailable. But, again, men were often not talkative in this area so prevalence of such activities was difficult to ascertain. Save to say, men who cook are not anomalies in Dominican households.

Bathing, Hair and Bodily Care. I observed numerous fathers bathing small children when I visited them at home or giving them a curative ‘sea bath’ by the bay (for ailments, e.g. flu). I can also recall several women remarking on uncles or brothers of theirs who ‘kango’ (‘cornrow’ braid) their...

---

99 Living either with a wife/girlfriend and child(ren) or as a single father with child(ren) and other extended family.
100 A dish of fish or smoked meat with provisions (plantain, yam, dasheen, green banana, green plantain), dombwé/dumplings and seasoning, cooked in a single pot over gas or coals.
daughter’s hair. Yet, it was only when I moved into Scratchie’s family yard that I began to see such proximate bodily care on a regular basis. Here I quote from my fieldnotes as I witnessed him and his 4-year-old daughter’s interactions across several days in 2013.

‘Taking out kango’ (7.10.13)

I arrive by Scratchie\textsuperscript{101} to see him seated at the table with his daughter standing next to him as he upbraids her hair and takes out her ‘kango’. ‘Ow daddy it hurts’, she says at one point as he pulls the thick final tooth of the pink and white swirly patterned comb though her short hair. He is taking out the style she had worn to school that day – presumably Cyrila [his wife] or [teenage] step-daughter had ‘combed’ [plaited] her hair that morning. As Scratchy progresses from one row to the next he is firm in his touch. A short ‘tough’ [stocky] man with full, hard, working hands; he is firm yet gentle in how he treats his daughter. [Mahalia:] ‘Ow daddy too hard’. [Scratchie:] ‘Sorry baby’ - as he works his way onto the next braid. I ask if he can ‘comb’ [as well as take out] hair. He says, ‘no, not to say kango, but I can plait’. As I leave them sitting at the table with the TV playing in the background Cyrila is on the phone in the bedroom, Mahalia is standing quietly and he is a picture of concentration - meticulously and dutifully unpicking each interwoven portion with the comb and his fingers.

Cleaning a ‘bobo’ (5.10.13)

It is Saturday night, after 7, and all the family are home, including Cyrila’s mother and niece who are staying. Mahalia has a ‘bobo’ [scab] on her forearm that she has been picking. ‘Let your fada take it out’, Cyrila instructs. ‘No’, Mahalia boldly responds, protesting that it would hurt. All of the family watch on as Scratchie tells her, ‘leme see it’. [Mahalia:] ‘Noooo, you going and take it out’, she pleads. Her father insists then reassures, ‘I just want to see it’. He held her to inspect it. Mahalia having trusted him enough to not wriggle, he then gripped her arm and was able to gain some purchase on a loose bit of hanging skin. He quickly ripped it away like a magician with a table cloth – having relaxed her enough that the surprise of the whole thing might limit the pain. But tears fell instantly

\textsuperscript{101} To ‘go by’ somebody is to visit them at home – in this case just across the yard from The Shack where I was dwelling.
as he instructed his step daughter to pass the feared peroxide and he began dabbing her small wound with a tissue swab of it. 'It doh hurt' he teased, calling her a 'kwapon' [coward] in a playful kind of a way\textsuperscript{102}.

\textit{Bathing in the Yard (4.10.2013)}

Friday evening after dark, I had finished up some repairs on the shack and I came up the concrete step to say 'good night' to the family. Scratchie was outside bathing Mahalia under the bright yellow bulb that illuminates their yard. He filled a 'bom' [cooking pot] with water as she shuffled around covered in suds, fighting the cool evening breeze. Her father then poured the bom over her whilst she scrubbed frantically and the soap rinsed away. As he poured she told him she was thirsty. She opened her mouth to drink the last bit of water before he wrapped her in a towel and she darted inside.

In addition to illustrating the kinds of everyday (and often unmarked) care that fathers undertake, these brief vignettes reveal the robust manner of some paternal care. The hard-worn hands of working fathers often practice caring labour with rigor, in a way that appears at odds with the gentle affectivity of the middle-class fathers presented in the posters above. This being true, the very fact of fathers improvising fatherly care, learning the tekni (techniques\textsuperscript{103}) of caring fatherhood (bathing, cooking, changing ‘Pamper’), especially as they inhabit bodies not habituated to softness\textsuperscript{104}, testifies to a committed if unremarkable love for their children.

Furthermore, by painfully disinfecting a child’s bobo with peroxide then playfully teasing them, braiding their hair with a heavy touch or washing them in a chilly yard, fathers help to develop a certain hardiness in their children. Even where only indirectly and unintentionally cultivated, dads

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{102} The term ‘a kind of a way’ functions in everyday parlance as an open-ended adverb for a gesture, tone of speech other action. The term is intentionally opaque to signal some imponderable aspect of social interaction – but of course the listener, immersed in the orator’s rendering, will usually have a clear impression of the action described.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{103} The outcome of individually honed craft, a self-developed skill (discussed in chapter 4, of the man who can turn his hand to any craft).}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{104} ‘Sof’ is an insult men throw at one another regularly on the ballfield, block or at work and is antithetical to the robust valorised image of a ‘big hard back man’ who eats ‘hard food’ (provisions) and can ‘play hard’ at football.}
thus inculcate a psychological and physical toughness\textsuperscript{105} in children they will eventually send into the world.

Homework. Many fathers also made a concerted effort to offer their children educational opportunities that they had squandered or been denied due to hardship during their upbringing. This emphasis on schooling came with a keen understanding that although more Dominicans than ever were receiving a high school and college education, employment opportunities were still few-and-far-between. As such, some fathers, like the majority of mothers, were intent on their children doing well in school and supported them with homework. I recall observing several fathers in the evening at the dinner table in their modestly sized wooden homes overlooking and assisting children as they copied handwriting tasks or maths equations in their exercise books. Whilst most fathers recognised their primary role as buying books and uniforms, some made it their duty to scrutinise the content written within.

‘Looking at’ Children. Finally, ‘looking at’ (minding) and simply being with children, often whilst a mother or other female kin were out (at work, church, visiting friends) was common amongst co-residing fathers; although, more frequently the mother would be home with children as the father was out making a visit or running an errand. Nonetheless, fathers staying at home was often the case for working-class parents because of the decline of commercial agriculture in the 1990s (notably bananas, see Mantz 2003), and the growth of service industries, in which mothers are more likely to have fixed-hours employment, whilst men, who more commonly work as tradesmen, have a flexible job schedule (like Beaver). Hence, I routinely observed children entertaining themselves in the yard after school (on weekdays from 1pm) whilst fathers were nearby fixing bicycles, cars, or doing house repairs whilst supervising them with their peripheral vision. In such instances dads would issue orders to ‘take it easy nuh, man’ if children were playing unsafely; and very young boy children and girls would be told to sit in the house and entertain themselves with a book, TV or tablet computer; whilst older boys might be encouraged to join in their father’s work by fetching tools.

\textsuperscript{105} Something locally valorised and described as a child being ‘good for their self’ (see chapter one) – i.e. bold, assertive and resilient (Paugh 2013: 115). Though mothers may scold and beat children, fathers are seen and expected to be tougher and firmer with children than mothers (often by mothers, see chapter 4).
Outside

Fathers traditionally play a pivotal, representational role in introducing their infants to the
exciting, larger outer world

- Diamond 1998: 261

Whether they live-apart or reside with their children, fathers are often seen by mothers and
children as a bridge to ‘outside’ public spaces: fêtes (festivals), the sea, the ‘Zion’ (garden), the
roadside, the workplace, even overseas countries. Lazarus-Black has argued that fathering is not
something every day, but happens through ‘kinship events’ (1995: 52), fathering moments if you
will. Although Dominican fathering occurs through the mundane activities I have described so far,
it also happens through fathering events, ‘taking the children out’ being perhaps the most familiar.
(Nevertheless, routine travel such as boarding buses, walking in the village or sitting side-saddle
on a bicycle to school with fathers is also common). ‘Taking the children out’ includes trips for ice
cream on ‘Bayfront’ (Roseau), a trans-insular drive, ‘going beach’ or ‘river’; and usually occurs
during holidays and weekends, outside of the humdrum routine. Furthermore, seasonal festivals
present an opportunity for children to be amidst the bacchanal of carnival, independence
celebrations or a village feast (traditional fêtes) under a father’s guidance. Similarly, Christmas Eve,
known as ‘shopping night’, is an occasion where fathers take children to town to shop for a gift.
Mothers typically demand fathers perform this duty. Possessing the means to provide treats and
amusement to his child esteems a man and is the idealised context of father-child co-presence in
the outside world (often fathers without money seem at a loss for how to entertain their children).
Similarly, this ideal motivates dedicated fathers of restricted means to make the sacrifices
necessary to take their child out. Here is a brief example of a father taking his child out as a
meaningful ‘event’ for dad and daughter.

Daddy ‘Jump Up’

On carnival Tuesday, 2014, Okim’s 10-year-old daughter walked the steep ‘Backstreet’ to wake
her father and remind him of his promise to take her to the Roseau parade. Like me, Okim lived
alone in a shack in Cyrilla and Scratchie’s yard. He had recently been injured in a motorbike

---

106 ‘Jump-up’ is the act of dancing behind and following bands in the Monday and Tuesday pre-Lenten
carnival precession.
accident and deported from a neighbouring island, so whilst he got back on his feet Scratchie had convinced Cyrilla to let him stay in the yard. He came down in a hurry to bathe in our communal shower. As he passed my door I offered him a quick drink and he shared his plan for the day,

I wanted to go town and free-up myself today but de moda say she not taking her [their daughter, to the] parade. Me and de moda jus get in a lickle talk [argument] for dat. But I checking, I doh want our daughter to see me and her moda in no vile [confrontation]... Best I go town wid her. Jah see what I doing, he alone that can give me my blessings... I
love my lickle girl, wii boy! She is all I have in dis world, I doh have woman [a girlfriend]. When I old and pooping on myself is she dat taking care of me, eh! She understands. If we go in town [and] I only have five dollars, she will ask for something for two-fifty. She understands!

For most of his male ‘partners’ the carnival season was a time of drunken bacchanal. By contrast, Okim’s choice to take his daughter to town instead of drink rum and *dwivay* (party/wander aimlessly) was an expression of love and small sacrifice for his child (albeit in response to his child-mother’s prompt). Okim clearly appreciated the time they spend together. And since his finances are limited he appreciated it even more for the fact that his daughter does not demand more than he can offer when they are out. Likewise, I could see from her excitement that she appreciates her father’s commitment to direct his time and funds to her during the festivities.

The following day I ‘bounced him up’ (bumped into him) on the block with his peers. ‘How your carnival was with the little lady, nuh?’ I queried as we ‘knocksed’ fists. ‘It was nice, wii,’ he replied with a wide smile, before adding, ‘anytime I wid her I cannot get in no gang or get in no *pwoblem*. Wen de music finish I leave town’. Thus, not only did their time together bring mutual enjoyment, it also saved her father from the potential perils that often befall young men at carnival (e.g. drunken brawls). As the following stills from my video of the 2014 festivities reveal, Okim was just one of many fathers - some ‘on island’ just for the carnival, others a routine presence in their children’s lives - who took their child(ren) out for ‘daddy jump up’.
Figure 27 - ‘Babydoll Skerrit’ and Reveller, Roseau 2014.

Figure 28 - Father and Son, Roseau. 2014.
Figure 29 - Man and his Daughters, Roseau. 2014

Figure 30 - Ouncie and his Son, Colihaut Carnival 2014.
These ethnographic vignettes and visual portraits of both quotidian caring labour and fathering events, reveal sentiments beneath the silence that often envelopes them. Although some of the textual and photographic depictions were framed by the father’s words, these words were spoken briefly during passing encounters, and in momentary exchanges rather than extended reflections. To depict via photo and description was to capture aspects of paternal experience which are there for the eye to see, yet fathers were without the vocabulary (or chose not) to express. In the final section, I turn to a burgeoning visual and textual representations of working-class-fathers themselves, as they begin to re-imagine intimate fathering from the ground-up in virtual space.

**Imag(in)ing Paternal Care: A Burgeoning Virtual Vocality**

Thus far I have discussed a paradoxical situation. One in which tightly gendered notions of parental care produce male silences, which, in turn, conceal an increasingly visible ‘hands on’ form of fathering in Dominica. This being true, online social platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram evidence an emergent paternal vocality that disrupts the men’s silences. Many fathers set profile pictures, ‘share’ or are ‘tagged in’ photos of themselves beside their children. The pictures present children who are their father’s ‘pride’, their ‘responsibility’, proof of their virility and proof of the continuity of their ‘name’ in the human world. But, these men of various classes and ages (teens to 40s) also caption their photos, which function as calls for public recognition as caring fathers. Such *captioned care*, offers a shorthand context for the images they frame by describing shared everyday activities or attempting to briefly put into words the man’s affection for his child.
What is particularly telling about the photos is not simply their portrayals of intimate fatherhood. Since the 70s and 80s as photography became more widely accessible, families have shared personal photographs of men cuddling, stood holding and being with their children (as several friends reported). Rather, what is novel is the volume of such images and the way their captions intentionally address a global online audience. They communicate with a diasporic public in both the region and the North Atlantic. And here the men participate in a cosmopolitan process of imaging and re-imagining, documenting and refiguring fatherhood from below (I recently observed that my working-class football teammates in Bristol, UK also participate in their own way in this global phenomenon – see fig 32).

![Image](image-url)

**Figure 11** - ‘Nothing better than hanging out with your kids. They are my heart beat’. Scratchie, daughters and step-grandson, Facebook. Dominica 2014.

![Image](image-url)

**Figure 32** ‘Paternal Profiling’. Working-Class British Fathers and Children,
Particularly for working-class Caribbean fathers such auto-photographic depictions, ‘selfies’ of everyday co-being with their children, engage in a dialogue with the polished middle-class representations propagated by family planning organisations and NGOs. Rather than focusing on images of middle-class intimacy and working-class fecklessness, such paternal profiling proclaims that anyone can be seen as a hands on father. Therefore, the kinds of portraits of care that were transacting into the Caribbean in the 1970s-80s from above (on posters and TV), are now entering the smartphones, tablets and laptop computers of Caribbeans in greater frequency. And more importantly, the images are no longer just those contrived by family planning agencies or American TV producers, or carried in the habits of returnees. Online platforms enable anyone with internet access, rich or poor to contribute to the definition of caring contemporary fatherhood through camera and text (most Dominicans now have access to internet supporting smartphones).

Particularly apparent amongst my online network of Dominican Facebook friends are the comment box commentaries beneath their shared images from a chorus of observers in Dominica and abroad (friends, kin, neighbours, ex-schoolmates). Senior women and some men - the stalwarts of respectable living and family values - issue words of acknowledgement, encouragement or critique in response to the practices depicted.
One popular example of the virtual Caribbean community’s appraisal of intimate fatherhood comes in response to a video posted on Facebook depicting a Jamaican man bathing his son outside. The video received a million views and some 1,300 comments. His predominantly Caribbean audience either praised him for undertaking such labour, found humour in or criticised his rough bathing style.

Wow beautiful, just beautiful.....weh the rest a fathers dem deh that need to step up?

A message to non-Caribbean...people. This is how we Jamaicans exercise our babies, so don’t think its child abuse cause it’s not

He bathing that baby like it was rolling in mud. Is why he scrubbin the child so? No baby is that dirty...

---

However, as the slim dreadlocked man in his 20s vigorously cleaned the child and dangled him to dry by his chubby limbs he addressed the camera and his message was clear,

...you see me, when it come to my yout dem me nah play! All if me ave a woman, an all if me doh have one, me still ah take care ah my yout! Because wann know why? Them got some fada out dere, all dem do is get up and breed people gal pickney [girl children], an gone bout dem business and doh care about dem [infants]. But you see me? Me a yout, me love my kid and me na wait pon uman [woman] fe do nottin for my pickney [child]... So me ah tell all fada out dere, you see dis what me a do right now-, unno [you all should] take care yur pickney dem, you [h]ear!?

Because you done know me ah feelin him you know... So as me ah say big up and respect to all fadda out dere and all mudda out dere who take care ah dem yout! Because you see him? Look pon him! He favour me [i.e. looks like him]. Him ah for me [i.e. he is my child]. Me love him you know, he is my son!

The voice of the young father, encouraging others to take care of their children, praising those parents who already do, and expressing his affection for his baby son, seems to drown out the squabbling chorus of Facebook commenters. As he holds his clean infant to his chest and declares his love for the child (me ah feelin him you know) it becomes clear that he, like others who post and caption photos with their children, has given burgeoning voice to nurturant Caribbean fatherhood through this new online medium. It remains for the future to reveal the extent to which this trend will contribute to broader re-definitions of care, and even a reconfiguration of gendered personhood in Dominica and the Caribbean world. Save to say, even if popular parenting ideology lags behind contemporary practice, it is evident that those who ‘step up’ (as the first commenter ordered) by engaging in intimate paternal care, are beginning to speak up. These fathers are finding voice and therefore demanding that their small acts be acknowledged, whilst inviting others top do the same.
Chapter 6. Performing and Precluding Respectability: Class, Masculinities and the Distinction of the "Family Man" in Dominica

Introduction
This chapter presents a life story and an ethnographic encounter, followed by an analysis of the broader structural and symbolic resonances of that encounter. At issue here is a politics of recognition concerning fatherhood and ‘respectable’ masculinity in Dominica. The life story follows the redemption of a felon-turned-father and fieldwork friend, Scratchie D, as he begins a new path of ‘living right’. The encounter involves the rebuffal of this aspiring ‘respectability’ and ‘family man’ status by a former enemy and government minister. The analysis then attempts to unpick the various class, colour and gender coded signifiers of that coalesce to make such a rebuffal possible. To
understand how Dominica’s stratified social landscape denies ‘lower-class’ men access to the lauded status of ‘family man’, and with it, recognition as fathers.

Before I continue, a brief comment on the ‘respectability’ analytic. Throughout, I deploy the concept to make sense of Scratchie’s journey and the ‘family man’ image for which he yearns. First introduced by Wilson in his ‘respectability-reputation’ model of Anglophone Caribbean societies (1969: 1973; 1974: 113-118), ‘respectability’ evokes hegemonic values, spaces, and behaviours inhabited by the elite, and strived for by middle and working-class folk oriented towards ‘the Queen’s English’, home, family, hierarchy, manners, stability, church, honesty and delayed returns. By contrast, the subaltern ‘reputation’ disposition was oriented towards the carnivalesque, the street, autonomy, mobility, trickery, bold performativity, rebellion, the occult and transience (see Puri 2003). Wilson associated reputation with masculine behaviours and contexts, which he recognised as embodying subaltern true spirit of the Antilles. By contrast he associated respectability with coloniality and women.

Scholars have challenged the model’s many circumscriptions: it bounded women within a ‘respectable’ frame, obscuring their oppositional practices (Sutton 1974: 100; Besson 1993); it committed social actors to either value-laden camp, rather than seeing ‘reputation-respectability’ as a continuum of symbols everyone negotiates (Freeman 2000: 109; Fog Olwig 2007 112; Wardle 2002: 505); its influence locked the transdiscipline of Caribbean studies into the study of ‘resistance’ and oppositionality (Puri 2003). Recognising these critiques as valuable contributions to evolving Caribbeanist understanding of those dynamics the dualism was trying to grasp, I offer an additional response to a lesser discussed aspect of Wilson’s model. Notably, men’s movement into respectability as they move through the lifecourse. This passage speaks audibly to the life-narrative at the centre of this chapter:

A man lives to acquire a reputation, and having done so he can preach reform and improvement. In his personal life, with his reputation secure, a man seeks to establish his respectability – by marrying, by regularly attending church, by becoming a true believer, by giving up alcohol ... and by living properly. (P J Wilson 1973:185)

Scratchie and his peers often use the terms ‘lower class’, ‘ghetto people’ or gens loub’ye (‘Loubiere people/ folk’) to describe themselves as those who ‘doh ave’ (the ‘have nots’ of the village/ society).
The life narrative I present below supports this general pattern in all but one key dimension. I take issue with Wilson’s portrayal of ‘respectability’ as an orientation that is open to all men who decide to commit to its values. In other words, there is no mention in his analyses of the barriers that deny, discredit or dismiss respectability by those who police its norms. Analysing Scratchie’s case, I contend that various instantiations of class, gender and colour intersect to synergistically qualify or deny respectability to particular men. Furthermore, discovering that signifiers of respectability and class determine a man’s recognition as a ‘family man’ and father, I query the implications of respectability politics for an individual man’s biography and the idea of the father in Dominica more generally. I ask, what avenues to respectability are available to Scratchie as a being in the world? And which men qualify as fully-fledged fathers in Dominica, and why?

To answer these questions, I use three scales of description/analysis: the personal (individual life story), the interpersonal (encounter) and the sociological (symbolic and structural). This is intended to enable the reader to encounter an individual, sense the individual’s confrontation with another, and then reveal what that interaction ‘says’ about their placing in the social world. The aim here is to gain a sense of respectability in the everyday as it is lived and denied. And this positioning of ethnographic and analytic scales, also mirrors my coming to understand Scratchie’s aspiring respectability: from hearing his life story in my second month of fieldwork, to slowly seeing the barriers and micro-aggressions that were placed before him and finally being able to situate this within a structural frame as I began to write about it. Therefore, this chapter is posited as a perspectival trajectory: from the viewpoint of the speaking subject, via me as ethnographer and outwards onto to the social world that affords or delimits the subject’s realisations (of respectability and ‘family man’ status).

Part 1. Scratchie’s Journey

‘Life for me was a journey!’ Scratchie announced, exhaling the smoke of his evening spliff which wafted above us, carried in the breeze of the river that runs to the Caribbean Sea beneath the falaise (escarpment) on which his yard sits. I scribbled, trying to keep up with his words.

I believe that no one can change the hands of time... The setting of time, Jah set his time. And he knows the road he set you on. Maybe, I... maybe the road I chose made me a better person today because the life I was living, I never thought today I would married, I would be a family man, and today I am, you understan’. That’s why I told you my life is a
story. I've been incarcerated more than 18 times. Every country I pass-, I've been to 13
different countries without a passport. My life is a story!

It was December 2012, my third month of fieldwork and my first time ‘reasoning’109 with ‘Scratchie
D’, a stout, charismatic black man aged thirty-seven from Loubiere. Upon telling two young men
of the same village about my research on men’s kinship lives some days earlier, they had
enthusiastically persuaded me to meet ‘Old School’ (as younger peers nicknamed him), a
churchgoing father-of-two who is married and ‘have live plenty life already’, as they put it. They
told me of his locally infamous life ‘on the block’, the roadside stage where ‘yout man’ like
themselves vie for respect in an ongoing play of solidarity and competition, as they survey their
scene for moneymaking opportunities. Scratchie excelled in this realm. Here he made his name.
The tales his young peers shared of his narcotics dealing, theft, incarceration and escape between
Gwada [Guadeloupe] and Dominica, all attested to Scratchie’s achieved ‘respect’ (‘reputation’) in
this ‘outside’ world of lower-class men110. However, his ‘partners’ (friends) also informed me of his
more recent moral and spiritual reorientation, his inward movement into house, home and
marriage. His ongoing project of refashioning himself into the respectable figure of ‘family man’.

In December 2007 Scratchie was freed from prison ‘for the last time’, he vowed. In the five years
between this release and our meeting, his life shifted radically. He began work at a nearby quarry
(see fig 35), entered a common-law union with his first girlfriend, Cyrilla, and became beau pé
(step-father) to her eldest daughter. With this new-found responsibility, he transitioned from self-

109 ‘Reasoning’ is an Anglophone Caribbean form of dialogue in which men (typically, but sometimes
women), sit or stand as they transact social, theological, philosophical and political reflections. It is typically a
Rastafarian mode of exchange, something like holding court amongst members of Nyabinghi
congregations. Yet, in its more informal everyday contexts reasoning ‘refers to the elaboration of principles
and understandings within a context of mutual exchange and respect.... to convey a discourse that is free
from intimidation and threat, and that should lead to higher levels of understanding’, as Brown et al put it

110 ‘Outside’ is the local and regional idiom for the theatre that is public space - the roadside / ‘de block’,
‘the club’ (nightclub), ‘a jam’ (party), ‘a lime’ (informal convivial drinking at a bar, home, in the street). Those
who regularly inhabit such spaces are referred to by elders as being ‘in the world’, satisfying carnal desires
and material wants, as opposed to living a church-going ‘quiet’ life.
provisioning, giving money to girlfriends, ‘liming’ with peers and occasionally ‘extending a hand’ to his mother, towards prioritising paternal provision; learning ‘what it really is to be a fada!’, as he put it.

Figure 35 - Loading a barge at work.

But, the contours of his transition were far from smooth. To Cyrilla’s frustration Scratchie was often drawn back to the block. In 2008 she became pregnant and gave birth to their first child. Tragically the infant unexpectedly died on his first day of nursery (from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome).

He was only t’ree months old ... I decided that was a sign. That was a wake-up call God was giving me ... I told her [Cyrilla] you know something, we’re gonna get married. We gonna’ start to, you know, live a different life.

In early 2009 Scratchie proposed and Cyrilla accepted. They converted to Pentecostalism, married and in December their daughter, Mahalia, was born.

As our interview continued Scratchie became more philosophical. He took a sip from his Guinness stout, turned to me and declared,
Life! Life is journey we have fe bear. Life is a mountain we all have to climb. We all have our span to live in life, but that is why I ask Jah for a long life. I want to see my children grow. I want to see them graduate. I want to see them pull my beard, my grandchildren pull my beard [he gestures]. That’s how I wan’ live now, man!

Two months after this first meeting, Cyrilla, who was heavily pregnant, gave birth to their second daughter. Eight months later Scratchie informed me his (step-)daughter was pregnant - he would soon become a grandfather.

![Happy Anniversary](image)

*Figure 36 - Scratchie and Cyrilla’s 2011 2-Year Anniversary E-Card*

From October 2013 to April 2014 I lived in a wooden shack in their yard. During this time, I saw Scratchie and his wife work long hours for little pay to maintain their family; she at an aquatic supplies store, he at the local quarry. I heard his self-convincing reminders that the block was ‘not like before’ and that he preferred to ‘pull up’ (hang out) at home. I observed him walking his two youngest daughters to and from pre-school, attentively assisting Mahalia with her homework and
'looking at' (watching, minding) them in the evenings when his wife and eldest daughter were at work or church. I listened to his wife lamenting his not quitting smoking weed or attending church as often as he should. And I witnessed his joy as a grandson entered their home.

Part 2. Redemption and Respectability Rebuffed

**Encountering Respectability: on the radio and on the road**

In March 2014 I accompanied Scratchie on national radio as we shared his life story with the Dominican public. Scratchie elaborated parts of his life narrative and answered questions, whilst I occasionally pitched-in with reflections informed by our countless conversations, interviews and my observations. He charmed callers and hosts alike with his infectious personality and lilting dance between dramatic crime stories and sober discussion of his salvational ‘mission’ to become an advocate for ‘de yout’, ‘God’s plan’ for him. Throughout the show he referred to himself as a ‘family man’ and ‘gwo nom’, or ‘big man in society’. He substantiated these titles by referring to his stable employment, married status, fatherly provision, capacity to make banking transactions and his becoming a taxpayer. All symbols of an aspiring formality. So, although his ageing momentum carried him into procreative family life, home and marriage (each markers of
respectable living), he also appealed to the dominant society for markers of this respectability. Hence, at one point in the show he proudly declared, 'I’m mista today, I was sakwé chien [damned dog] before. I was sakwé chien, but right now I’m a family man and that’s why everything change about me’.

![Figure 38 - Scratchie on DBS Radio show ‘Straight Talk’ with hosts Delia Cuffy-Weekes (pictured) and Kimara Hurtault](Image)

Leaving the station, he continued one of his accounts. The hosts and I heard of the time he outwitted a police prosecutor in court by exposing an error the officer had made on his ‘charge paper’. This provoked the prosecuting officer to curse Scratchie during the court session, forcing the magistrate to throw-out the case for contempt of court. We shared in laughter at his cunning Anancy-like tale.

---

111 Follow URL to my research blog for full audio recording of the show – [Stable URL] http://fathermen.blogspot.co.uk/2013/06/straight-talk-on-dbs-fascinating-post.html [Accessed 20-7-15]

112 Anancy the Spider is the folk-tale hero of Caribbean formerly enslaved peoples. S/he resides in the
As we stood outside the station absorbed in Scratchie’s orature, by sheer serendipity the very same officer from his story, now an ‘honourable government minister’, happened to be leaving the neighbouring studio. ‘Look! Mr Blackburn, Mr Ronald Blackburn know me very well!’, Scratchie announced, grabbing the minister’s attention and shifting ours in anticipation of the man’s reaction: ‘And how I know you?’, Blackburn replied disinterestedly,

Scratchie: As a notorious crim-i-nal!

Blackburn: And you happy about it?

Scratchie: I was happy about it, at de time ...

Their conversation was fast becoming a cross examination,

Blackburn: So you have changed?

Scratchie: I am a changed man. Married and have a family. I growing my life. Working for six years...

Blackburn: That’s good.

Scratchie: I working and paying taxes like everybody else! It’s jus dat I doh like de way all you [politicians] running de country. All you have de youts going astray Mr Blackburn!

Blackburn’s tone suddenly shifted; ‘And you have changed!! You have not changed as you say you have. You have not changed!’ The minister began to walk away. ‘You’re worse! Worse!’, he called over his shoulder. Fumbling for his SUV keys he then promptly started the vehicle and a loud calypso roared “Dominicaaaa...” from the stereo as he accelerated up the dimly lit road.

Anglophone region’s literature and popular consciousness. Synonymous with wit and trickery, Anancy is a figure of ambiguous morality (and sometimes gender: ‘Brother Anancy’ / ‘Sister Nancy’), bending the rules to outsmart and triumph over larger and stronger opponents. A deity in West Africa then re-figured into a being who is part-human part-spider, ‘Nancy stories’ have inspired cunning acts of defiance amongst oppressed Caribbean folk throughout the region’s long exploitative history and present. However, Anancy is more popularly recognised in Jamaica than Dominica and as such Scratchie is unlikely to see his actions as ‘anancyist’. This being true, Anancy serves as a useful hermeneutic for bringing together a range of cunning oppositional acts.
Reading the encounter

On an interpersonal level the minister’s dismissal of Scratchie’s claim to redemption can be read as a clash of adversaries with a personal history of hostility. The legitimacy of Scratchie’s appeal to be ‘a changed man’ and ‘family man’, rubbished by an enemy armed with first-hand knowledge of his patchy past. Yet, at structural level, one might also see this as a confrontation between two categories of person, two categories of man. One a lower-class black man of nefarious repute and aspiring respectability; the other a middle-class, brown, educated and ‘honourable’ minister, situated at the apex of ‘respectability’. When the minister dismissed Scratchie’s claims to be a ‘family man’ and ‘changed man’, he did so with the implicit knowledge that to be publicly regarded as a ‘family man’ (synonyms of a ‘good man’ and ‘good father’) requires numerous markers of class distinction. In other words, some combination of: a professional job, fair complexion, sizable income, sound (post)colonial education, a command of ‘good manners’, ‘standard English’ and a reputable family background. In short, one must be of ‘good name’. But, with little formal education (having left school aged 12), dark skin, a gruff (albeit infectious) manner and a little-known family name beyond his local community, Scratchie was without the hegemonic signifiers of respectability to which Blackburn laid claim. Furthermore, to those who knew of him, his past had placed a stain upon his public name.

That said, blending these micro and macro frames offers a third reading of the encounter. A more nuanced interpretation which reveals how structural symbols of class and gender intersected to stir masculine contradictions in both men. Here was a clash between men of different classes who have gained acclaim for their ‘reputation’ (Scratchie) and ‘respectability’ (Blackburn) respectively. Yet, each require recognition in the domain mastered by the other to achieve the credibility their contemporary personas require. However, their brief conflict exposed their inability to fully access such credibility, to balance reputational and respectable elements; causing one to recall a moment of being shamed by the other, and provoking him to reciprocate such shaming.

For Blackburn, a brown middle-class parliamentarian, reputation means social legitimacy (to his working-class electorate), masculine recognition and charismatic leadership, but must be carefully

113 Concerning family names, an interlocutor of Fog Olwig underlined the importance of patronymic inheritance in determining one’s status: ‘In Dominica, it is the name [that has significance] – who your father was – and the name is handed down from generation to generation’ (2002: 98).
managed, concealed and revealed at various moments, and balanced by symbols of respectability to maintain the proper decorum of someone in government office. My observations of Dominica chime here with Wilson’s of Providencia,

Even those having... prestigious occupations must prove themselves according to the basic standards of reputation. Thus a schoolteacher, however learned he may be, will carry little authority unless he fathers children, mixes freely with other men in the rum shop, and can compete with them when challenged... some sense of balance is maintained, primarily through discretion (Wilson 1973: 160-1).

The same is true I would contend for the politician, who must perform reputation in given moments, then act with respectable discretion at others. Within their interpersonal history this equilibrium was disrupted when Scratchie cunningly outwitted Blackburn in court and exposed his lack of self-control by causing him to curse. Thus, Blackburn was neither reputationally savvy enough to counter his opponent’s wiliness in-kind, nor respectably cultivated enough not to lose his cool. For Blackburn, their re-encounter will have likely recalled the dishonour of the court scene.

Within their clash in court Scratchie had hit upon a sensitive historical nerve. For as Alexander (1984) has argued, the Caribbean middle-class, who emerged post-emancipation from between the enslaved black labouring-class and the white (British) plantocracy, today seeks continual distinction from the lower-classes whilst never quite becoming elite. This group, he argues, harbours a residual ‘belief in its own dishonour’, an enduring relation to those it denigrates and attempts to symbolically distinguish itself from (1984: 173). Middle-class men embody this internal contradiction, Alexander suggests, for they are situated ‘on two tracks at the same time’, balancing the respectable symbols of married family life and occupational status with valorised reputational practices like ‘liming’ and ‘outside’ sexual exploits. Here, middle-class women often express concern with their men’s deeds, in part out of fear that they will compromise their symbolic class standing (Alexander 1977). Hence, this need to both earn a male reputation and to be upstanding is a tension that many individual middle-class men find hard to negotiate. Olwig powerfully demonstrated this in her portrayal of the life of a middle-class Dominican man who grappled with alcoholism as he oscillated between the symbolic poles of his schoolhouse where he was a teacher and the rum shop; between being a ‘family man’ and ‘liming’ with men of his village
Returning to the encounter, the weight of nearly 200 years of gendered and classed tension sat implicitly beneath Scratchie and Blackburn’s exchange. In short, the latter’s dismissal of Scratchie’s appeals to respectability were charged by vexed personal and structural histories.

For Scratchie, aspiring to move into respectability, his contradictions were laid plain for all to witness on national radio. However, the dramatic irony of the scene outside the station was that Blackburn did not know this was why Scratchie was standing speaking with two well-known middle-class figures (the hosts) and an unknown ‘high-coloured’ foreigner (me). Blackburn likely assumed he was trying to impress us, as Scratchie later told his wife,

What he [Blackburn] thought now, is I was passing and I see dem two woman and I trying to make myself\textsuperscript{114}, you understand. So he try to shame me in front dem but as he tell me ‘how do I know you’, I tell him ‘as a notorious criminal!’ So dat jus kill de whole vibes [Blackburn’s attempted shaming], not knowing dat my life I come out and talk to dem [about] on national radio.

Unlike the middle-class man who must conceal his personal contradictions, working-class men in Scratchie’s situation must bare all or risk being ‘shamed’ and having their performance of respectability discredited. A man of Blackburn’s structural position, by contrast, always has rank to fall back on (his profession, qualifications, family name). Whereas, a working-class man’s, worst still a working-class former felon’s, respectability is significantly more precarious. So, although Scratchie avoided shaming in this instance, in other quotidian contexts, such as a payday supermarket visit to buy groceries for his daughters, where the teller asked him where he had acquired ‘all that money’ (insinuating by illegal means), he is unable to avoid everyday swipes at his propriety.

Should Scratchie have possessed particular signifiers to bolster his respectability perhaps it would be more secure. For example, if he had the capital of a local entrepreneur or medium scale farmer he might have fashioned the respected persona of ‘the man of substance’, referring to the ideal of

\textsuperscript{114} To ‘make oneself’ is to establish oneself and become at home socially (as discussed concerning my social accommodation in chapter 1). In this case, the connotation is of someone who also does not belong attempt to establish themselves upwards in the status hierarchy without possessing the necessary credentials to do so.
a man who balances symbols of ‘respectability’ (well-off, married, attends church) against those of ‘reputation’ (charismatic storytelling, convivial drinking in the village, code switching into kwéyol, and generosity; Olwig 2007: 111; Wylie 1982: 443, 465). However, within hierarchical structures of class, pigment\textsuperscript{115} and patriarchy\textsuperscript{116} Scratchie’s past, his manual occupation and income coalesce with his dark complexion and unrefined manner exclude him from respectable recognition according to prevailing models of respectable manhood.

It is worth briefly noting that expressions of respectability in the contemporary Anglophone Caribbean have shifted somewhat since those encountered by Wilson in the 1950s. Anthropologists have noted such changes in contexts as varied as women’s off-shore labour (Freeman 2000) and female middle-class entrepreneurs (Freeman 2014) in Barbados or Christmas rituals in Trinidad (Miller 1994). In Dominica, the general nuancing of class categories with regional and metropolitan migration, remittance incomes and changing tastes; along with the introduction of new religious forms (e.g. Islam and Pentecostalism), have each shifted the meaning of respectability beyond its traditional expressions (by middle and upper-class Catholics and Anglicans). Given this context and the risks of being shamed for performing an unsubstantiated version of respectable masculinity, Scratchie improvises his own version of respectability – \textit{vai ki vai (ad hoc)} – from symbolic elements within his reach\textsuperscript{117}. Hence he assembles a married, Pentecostal, stably employed, taxpaying, paternal respectability upon the foundations of his spectacular criminal past, his ‘reputation’. However, here he finds himself in a bind, in a limbo of sorts (to use a regional trope) – which analytically complicates Wilson’s theoretical allusion to a smooth ageing male transition from reputation to respectability (1973:185, see quote above).

\footnote{\textsuperscript{115}Here I allude to the concept of a ‘multilayered pigmentocracy’ (Lewis 1983: 9), a social order that is structurally aggregated according to the shade of one’s skin and other racial phenotypic features (e.g. nose, hair texture) up an Afro to Euro white-supremacist hierarchy. This social order - although often ambiguated for example by Black leaders (region wide) and ‘poor whites’ (e.g. in Barbados) - largely prevails throughout the Caribbean as a persisting legacy of plantation enslavement and European colonisation; though, often in much subtler form than in the past (e.g. 1970s Dominica, when banks employed only lighter skinned people).}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{116}Of men demeaning ‘lesser’ men within normative hierarchies of masculinity.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{117}Elements which, as anthropologist Deborah Thomas highlighted in response to an earlier draft of this paper given at the Caribbean Studies Conference 2015, look quite different today to those of the 1960s Providencia Island where PJ Wilson inducted his theory. In contemporary Dominica, Pentecostal churches offer a charismatic Christian alternative to the hierarchies of a Catholic church in which men of modest rank could acquire little acclaim.}
Scratchie experiences a paradox of incomplete transcendence. That is, he needs his ‘bad’ past to work as juxtapositioned proof of his ‘good’ present, but as a result he can never truly surpass it. His past brings ‘respect’/’reputation’, the foundation of his contemporary masculine status, for it evidences how far he has come. Hence, it also provides a righteous template for ‘de yout’ to follow. Thornton (2013) has depicted similar narratives of metamorphoses amongst born-again ex-felon Pentecostal preachers in Santo Domingo, arguing that their sinner-to-saint testimonies give charismatic authority to their sermons, transforming ‘residual masculine’ respect into community-based respectability. But, although true to an extent for Scratchie, he is without the institution of church to support the sincerity of his transformation. His problematic past also follows him, giving his foes (on a small island where the personal pasts are proximate) the ever-present opportunity to remind him of former wrongs and question the legitimacy of his life-change (as Blackburn did). In sum, Scratchie uses his notorious personal history, life experience and personality, alongside his burgeoning formality, to forge a sense of recognition as a socially mature gwo nom or ‘big man in society’. Yet, as the episode with Blackburn reveals, the power of his biography is double-edged, and can always be invoked to call into question his present claims to have changed.

Amongst those who know Scratchie well and believe in his transformation – his ‘boss man’, family friends, the radio hosts, former prison guards, several police inspectors and me – he has a circle of allies of middle-class standing who will corroborate his claims to be ‘a changed man’. But, amongst working-class members of his community and some middle-class folk less supportive of his ‘mission’, there is still scepticism concerning his metamorphosis. I observed particular attention being given to his comportment and any signs of ‘backsliding’ (a biblical concept connoting relapse into ‘bad ways’ - fighting, smoking marijuana or cursing in public). For example, the day after the Radio show a magistrate who had been listening told me she supported his cause (‘I like the vibes, man!’); but, commenting on him answering his phone live on air, she added, ‘he not serious, man!’ Thus, the magistrate perceived his disregard for politesse to dilute the sincerity of his redemptive claims. And this popular scrutiny was encapsulated by his mother-in-law, his

---

118 He has dedicated himself to God but fails to attend church regularly with his family over scriptural disagreements with pastors.

119 Particularly true of a small island where one’s public ‘name’ is of paramount social importance (to their place in the world) and an individual’s trespasses are slow to fade from social memory.
beloved yet staunchest critic. She bore witness to the complete journey of transformation throughout Scratchie’s 20 year on-off courtship with her daughter. In an interview about his life and fathering she emphatically stated the need to demonstrate his complete transformation to be taken seriously as a changed man. Dwelling on his marijuana consumption she stated,

If you decide to change on one [thing] you have to change on everything... you are a perfectly, definitely changed man?! But if you doing one and you haven’t changed in the other, that is not perfect. You have to show dem you change; you stop it!

Redemption must be absolute for the lower-class man; a sentiment shared by even his closest friend and supporter, his wife. She and others close to him are all too aware that people’s knowledge of Scratchie’s past render his claims to respectability readily tainted by the slightest infarction. For those of ‘high complexion’, structural position and comportment, the privilege of their status enables the very same such daily misdeeds to be overlooked. This double standard has significant implications for who is afforded ‘family man’ status, and hence, who comes to gain recognition as a father. In the following section such implications are briefly explored, before I conclude with the intervention of an elder who seeks to disrupt this popular fiction.


Returning to the lauded status of ‘family man’ (a metonym for male respectability), this idiom has little to do with daily familial practice and everything to do with the performance of distinction. Notably class, colour and occupational prestige. For example, a married ‘brown’ (skinned) police inspector, who reflected in an interview that he was an ‘absent-present’ father during his first marriage, was much more readily recognized as a father in the public eye than other caring men of lesser means that I came to know. Similarly, I also experienced this process of privileged recognition first hand. As an educated shabin (light skinned) male of British upbringing and accent, I was often asked in an almost surprised tone why I had not ‘mek chile, as yet’. Children would have affirmed a ‘family man’ and ‘big man’ status that was apparently mine to claim. Thus, men of my colour, class and educational profile are readily invited to take on such a status, whilst even the most experienced and active fathers of Scratchie’s class and colour position are often
denied such privilege. Hence, Dominicans' public recognition of fatherhood is predicated not on a man's direct commitment to family or children, but on his status. Status being indexical of his capacity to provide for children (Brown et al 1993: 18).

In his work on middle-class fathering in Jamaica, anthropologist Jack Alexander (1977) termed this phenomenon, whereby rank determines paternal recognition, 'status euphoria'. He wrote,

> What we have is a kind of status euphoria arising from the public domain and spreading into the family. The status of the male in the public domain simply translated into the language of the family (1977: 383).

Men of respectability and prestige are celebrated for their virtuous presentation of a cultivated persona and family life. As Alexander elaborates, the performance of the middle-class ‘family man’ role largely involves ‘maintain[ing] proper appearances with a public home, wife and offspring and private outside [sexual] relations' (1977: 377; see too RT Smith 1987; Green 2013; Angrosino 1986). Hence, concealment of the kinds of respectability compromising contradictions discussed in the previous section enables the viability of this profile. Thus, his image as a married, providing patriarch takes precedent over a ‘family man’s' daily commitment to or presence in the lives of his children. And since maintenance is prioritised and men gain little esteem for their caring paternal practices (as I argued in chapters 4 and 5), this disjuncture between their daily practice and appearance of fatherhood persists.

In popular narratives, the image of the middle-class ‘family man’ is positioned in contradistinction to the anxiety-inducing stereotype of lower-class fathers, who purportedly, ‘doh like to take care of their children’. This feckless father trope abounds in the sermons, speeches and newspaper articles of pastors and politicians– themselves, men of respectable rank and moral standing – who admonish the popular mass of Dominican men to ‘play their part’. These narratives are neither new nor Dominica-specific. Rather they echo a ‘social pathology’ model (Trouillot 1992: 26) of lower-class black families that recurs throughout the Antilles (see Barrow 2001), the post-plantation Americas and into North Atlantic metropoles where Caribbeans have settled

---

120 Former UK Prime Minister David Cameron issued a controversial statement in 2008, echoing Barrack Obama’s admonishment of black fathers to present themselves to their children. Cameron took the liberty of calling for ‘a responsibility revolution’ among black fathers in the UK (The Guardian, July 2008).
Introduction chapter). In many such discourses, lower-class fathers are portrayed as ‘missing men’ (Blackwood 2005) who sire children and ‘doh look back’, as some framed it. It is against this persistent figuring of lower-class fathers as a problem that Scratchie, and others like him, attempt to fashion their ‘family man’ personae in contemporary Dominica.

Mr Pierre’s Cultural Critique

Mr Pierre is a brown man aged 60. A retired police inspector and full time father, he would be described locally as a ‘quiet man’, neither boastful nor flashy, and his comportment is mannerly and straightforward. During a life-history interview he shared memories of his hard-working father, a fisherman and baker, in relation to dominant ideals of fatherhood then and now. He commented on the lack of recognition men like his dad received for their devoted fathering from the wider society and family life commentators such as pastors, politicians (even by comparison to Pierre, who ascended to the respectable status of inspector). He noted,

I’m yet to hear any proponent of good qualities in men, say for example ‘[look at] this little fella, in this little house over dere, he’s married and he’s raising six children, he has a little job that barely allows him to feed his family.... [but] he’s an honest man. The man takes his children to church on a Sunday morning; he will take them to the park. He does not have a vehicle so he cannot take them for a ride. But by god he will deny himself a beer’... [No] He’s an invisible man. It’s like he does not exist. These [men] never seem to feature.

According to Pierre, basic respectable values like honesty, being ‘God fearing’ (as West Indians describe dedicated Christians), self-sacrifice, marital commitment and labouring long hours to provide for a family do not guarantee a man social acknowledgement as a ‘good father’. Then he discussed the 1980s, when he became a father, as well as the present day, then returned to his father. Shifting back and forth in time he alluded to the celebration of masculine status as a perennial theme,

We look for the Michael Jordans; we look for the lawyer. What do we know of them? What do we know of their relationships? What do we know of their character? Nothing. Little or nothing. And worst yet, we don’t care to know. My father for example, I mean his close associates and friends who knew him, they respected him because of his hard work. But if anybody had to—even in his day—to be looking for a role model as a father, he would
not get mentioned! They would look for the village doctor, probably the mayor of the
town...

So from a village doctor or a mayor to a sportsman, there is a shift from educated middle-class
professional and local official to global celebrity sports star. Between each the status euphoria
persists. Then, Pierre posed a series of provocative questions back to his society,

So what are we saying? We are saying to the world that to be a good role model, as a
man, as a father, as a head of a household, you must have a big name. Everybody must
know [you]. You must be out there, be held up. I believe this is one of the reasons why we
are having the problems [in Dominica]. Because people are growing up, the young people
are growing up believing that it is not good enough to be an honest man, to be a hard-
working individual, to a responsible-, a law abiding individual. You have either to be a
lawyer, you have either to be a doctor, to be a good man, to be a good father. You must
have a big good car... you must have this, you must have that, you must have more than
what you need to raise your family well.

Firstly, Pierre decries the preoccupation amongst commentators and society more generally with
fathers who not only perform the provider role by meeting the material needs of their families, as
his father did, but conspicuously exceeding such needs. Hence, the visibility of the politician,
doctor, lawyer or sportsman father, obscures the less well-off father with respectable values. The
latter becomes socially invisible as a ‘family man’ and father. In other words, regardless of values, it
is social rank and financial profile that determine his recognition as a father.

Secondly, Pierre’s lament highlights the implication of this image of fathering for the majority of
Dominicans; whether a woman looking for a parental partner or to young men themselves. For
him the models of respectable masculinity that are held up as ideal are entirely inaccessible to
most Dominicans.121 I heard this sentiment eloquently repeated by a 15-year-old girl from the
National Youth Council (a youth representation organ) at a CariMAN meeting. Responding to a
series of speeches on ‘male role models’ by CariMAN members who work for a homeless NGO,
the Welfare Department and the Ministry of Education (the kind of family life commentators Pierre
alluded to above) she mentioned that young men of her age are presented with a host of

121 They perhaps resemble the spectral image of the ‘white father’ in the introductory chapter.
‘superficial’ and inaccessible figures to follow. She mentioned how her male peers face everyday struggles to secure incomes and earn ‘respect’. She spoke with an assurance, which arrested the room. Then she boldly urged CariMAN representatives to point ‘the yout’ to models of masculinity that were less remote to their experience of the world, to locate role models who ‘look a little bit more human’.

Here was an unexpected alliance of voices: an elder man and experienced father who had reflected on his paternal role, urging his society to reconsider its fatherhood templates; and a teenage girl, perhaps imagining the kinds of ‘child-fathers’ boys of her generation might become given the ‘role models’ laid before them. Both sought to promote proximate models of masculinity and fatherhood that the majority of Dominican males might imagine becoming. Far from reinforcing the practice of writing middle-class status and respectability onto fatherhood, both commentators were more concerned with lived realities being regarded on their own merit.

Conclusion

Men like Scratchie, who have moved from a life on the block towards an honest and modest life at home, stand in an interstitial limbo between memories of notoriety and elusive aspirations of an ever-exclusive respectability. However, to scratch beneath the surface of appearances, to closely observe and listen to Scratchie’s life narrative or hear Mr Pierre discussing his father, is to be confronted by fathers motivated by a profound though understated sense of duty. Duty motivated not by prestige and public recognition, but by dyadic paternal commitment to children. These are realities that demand acknowledgement. To return to Mr Valerie, who puts it more eloquently than I could hope to,

It’s not so much as being praised, for doing what you are supposed to be doing, really, but at least being noticed. Being noticed. Some note ought to be taken. Look at these people, look at their circumstances, look at their struggles. Yet, they’re determined to do the best they can for their children. They practice self-denial as a religion.

It is towards such quietly dedicated men that I propose scholars, pastors, ‘honourable ministers’ and other Caribbean family commentators direct our recognition as we overcome missing men anxieties, euphoric fathering fictions and, instead, present honest models of paternal practice.
Figure 39 - Scratchie and his 1st daughter Mahalia during a trip to Guadeloupe
Chapter 7. Becoming Papa:
Kinship, Senescence and the Ambivalent Inward Journeys of Ageing Men in the Antilles

Introduction

It often takes men a lifetime to realise fatherhood. In many cases, it is not until a man ages and becomes a grandfather, until he is freed from immediate masculine imperatives, does he experience the closeness to kin that children and ‘child-mothers’ might have hoped from him. In such, cases it takes a man to ‘ketch himself’, as they say, for him to reflect on his familial shortcomings and abdications, before he eventually settles into close relations with kin. And even this senescent moment often features considerable ambivalence; between his present and past selves, between the gendered spaces they inhabit/ed.
This chapter explores this widespread pattern of centripetal later-life movement among Caribbean men (Barrow 2010: 31). It follows the last chapter by dealing with men’s biographic journeys into kin-oriented lives. Rather than a concern with symbols of respectability as qualifiers of fatherly recognition (see chapter 6), it focuses on father’s changing practices, as they become papa, along with the ambivalent feelings that accompany such changes. This theme of ambivalence - a running issue throughout the many paradoxes and contradictions that have characterised preceding chapters – becomes explicit and evident here. I draw together the running tensions between being ‘tied’ into kinship and oriented towards the transient ‘outside’ worlds of men. It is telling therefore that even when men voluntarily settle into a more home and kin-focused life (as opposed to being forced by the court, chapter 4; compelled by love magic, chapter 2; or guided by their own ‘speaking’ blood, chapter 3), they often fall silent and continue to feel drawn towards elsewhere. In fact, these tensions are never resolved; as this transgenerational journey will demonstrate.

The intention of this chapter is to understand how Caribbean men’s kinship experiences change as they move through later life – a phase beginning for some men as early as their late thirties. To do so I present a series of ethnographic snapshots of Dominican men aged thirty-seven to seventy-four decelerating into a slower daily rhythm, contracted socio-spatial routine and kin-centred life. Yet, complicating any notion of a linear journey ‘inside’, are the men’s fond tales of ‘reputation’-making adventures (spear fishing, sexual conquest, crime stories) and life in the ‘outside’ world of their ‘partners’ (friends). I take such reminiscences to disclose a dissonant inside-ness and enduring existential affinity to a world once inhabited by their virile younger selves. Nonetheless, being a grandfather and ambivalently ‘inside’ is just one of the generational moments under focus. I also engage the question of intergenerationality in biographical terms, developing a picture of the process of becoming papa (grandfather). Hence, individual life trajectories are traced, through three overlapping generational layers – being fathered, becoming fathers and becoming grandfathers – to understand how men’s kinship lives change with time.

Methodologically, the narrated personal histories of eleven grandfathers reflecting back on kinship lives through the lived present, ethnographically inform my claims. However, in
places I also draw on the reflections of adult children (now parents themselves) who contrast the men’s fathering and grandfathering. Furthermore, I employ ‘observant participation’ (introduced in chapter 1) to gain a practical everyday picture of the grandfathers’ spatial movements and intimate interactions with grandchildren. Qualitative depth and a sincere representation of lived experience, rather than statistical representativeness, are my intentions here. There is the temptation in Caribbean sociology to statistically review whether Caribbean men are fundamentally ‘absent’ or ‘present’ vis-à-vis households and family life (Roberts and Sinclair 1978: 58). This is not my intention here nor has it been throughout the thesis thus far. Rather my modest aim is to present rich illustrations of individual lives that claim representative fidelity only to themselves. Nevertheless, speaking for themselves in all their contextual specificity the biographies are, I would argue, reflective of wider Dominican, even regional trends.

My focus here is individual transgenerational trajectories, rather than traditional approaches to generation as a ‘before-after’ juxtaposition of analytically separated generational cohorts. This biographic approach has the benefit of revealing the simultaneity of generation. Much like Stephanie Lawler’s shifting and doubly constituted mother-daughter subjects (2000: 3), the elder narrators in this chapter variably present themselves as sons, fathers and grandfathers, interchangeably shifting generational location as they look back on particularly meaningful aspects of kinship pasts. This enables an understanding of how men’s relations to kin (specifically fathers, children and grandchildren) as well as symbolically gendered spaces (‘inside’, ‘outside’, home, yard, street - Barrow 2010: 128) are transformed throughout Dominican males’ social ontogeny. At the same time as revealing details of the changing lives, spaces and practices of men and their kin, this framing also sheds light on changing wider kinship ideas, processes and events in Dominica through historical time. Significantly, the post-war migration of fathers to England in the 1950s/60s, the emergence from the late 1970s of an explicit Caribbean concept of fatherhood (elaborated from chapter 6), and the repeating experience of
familial emigration in response to economic crises and natural disasters (e.g., Hurricane David) – each patterned the men’s familial lives in particular ways.

Before continuing, it is necessary to note that the unruly circumstantial course of each individual biography inevitably disobeys the sequential neatness that my ‘generational moments’ model might imply. As Wole Soyinka has argued, ‘neither child nor father is a closed chronological concept’ (in Loichot 2000:110). Indeed, such categories as father overspill the ordering lines drawn between them. Particularly in the Antilles, where the open-ended and flexible nature of social categories has been widely acknowledged (Mintz 1996; Rodman 1971; Wardle 2007).

Consequently, it is important to keep in mind that these generational phases, separated in response to their narrated salience, are far from bounded. They are experientially continuous, overlapping and defy simple chronology (e.g., having children before discovering your father’s identity; thus becoming a father before becoming a man’s son).

The experiences and practices of elder men in families is an untheorized and under-documented area of Caribbean enquiry (with the exception of several brief mentions: Barrow 2010: 114, 118; Brodber 2003; Ford-Smith 1989: 98; Henriques 1953: 113, 197; Rubenstein 1987: 244). Too often, preoccupations with the vexed topics of fatherhood and ‘matrifocality’ have led scholars to miss the cooperative (non-authoritarian) roles of consanguineal men in households and kin networks (Stack 1974). Therefore, grandfathers, uncles and brothers have been also peripheralized into relative obscurity in most Caribbean kinship studies. Furthermore, although the traditional Caribbeanist bounding of gendered domains, ‘inside’ (home, church, yard - feminine) and ‘outside’ (street, ‘fete’, rum shop - masculine), have been problematised for ignoring women’s movements between such spaces (Sutton 1974: 100; Besson 1993), there’s little consideration of how elder men negotiate ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ lives (much as I argued in chapter 6 concerning ‘reputation’ and ‘respectability’ in middle-age). Hence, my aim here is also to illustrate the reorienting, and often disorienting, movement of men between these symbolic realms as they age; thus demonstrating the porousness and changing dynamics of gendered space over time.

As Sons

*Paternal ‘Absences’ and Reunions*

Growing up not knowing one’s father, having a father who was psychically and physically remote or ‘absent’, was a common experience amongst the grandfathers I came to know. A number of
them held feelings of abandonment and anger towards the men who had left their mothers, their village or the island during their infancy, migrating like many of that generation to England in the 1950s/60s and never ‘sending for them’. For some, fathers were men who refused to acknowledge them or were never ‘given’ paternity for them by their mothers; mothers who bore the sole burden of their upbringing, ‘mother and child left to the elements’ as one grandfather described it. Others felt indifference towards men whom they simply did not know, for whom they had only a vacant figurative outline, an unfulfilled idea of what a father should be. Yet, their ideal image of a committed and provisioning patriarch was at odds with the realities of a man they had never met or had only vague childhood memories of passing on the road or visiting their mothers. Nevertheless, with the passage of time – having successfully survived into adulthood (without him), having become fathers themselves, and having reflected on the existential imbalance of not knowing the man responsible for ‘putting them there’ – some of the men sought to (re)activate relations with their fathers. These (re)unions were moving tales of inclusion into paternal lineages founded on the powerful principle of shared ‘blood’ and an ideal of familial togetherness.

Unlike the anticlimactic reunion tales of adult children and biological parents documented by Carsten (2000), I contend that the mutual amity expressed by father and son, their emphasis on the significance of shared ‘blood’ and their folding of disjunct kinship time through ‘as if’ narratives (i.e., remarking that it is ‘as if’/like they were raised by their fathers), produce an affective continuity of being between father and son.

Mr Scotland’s Story

‘I was raised without a father … he totally abandon us!’ said Mr Scotland, a tall, fifty-nine-year-old police officer, father-of-six and grandfather-of-two as he reflected on his relationship with a father who had left for England when he was just four. Bearing only the parting memory of being driven around Portsmouth (Dominica’s northern town) on his father’s motorbike days before his departure, it would be forty-six years before Mr Scotland saw him again. During his early adult life, he felt forsaken by this man: ‘I had more rage in me, that if I meet him I prob’ly have strangle him’, he told me during a life-history interview. However, after meeting and being embraced by his paternal family (aunts, grandmother, cousins) while a junior officer stationed in their outlying natal
village, followed by their subsequent disappearance during the havoc of Hurricane David in 1979 (when crops were destroyed and much of the population emigrated), and his reunion with a paternal aunt in 2003 when she was visiting from the United States (where they had emigrated, post-David), he had a realization:

I grow up. I reach forty-nine, and I say you know something, it’s damn nonsense ... my father cannot be alive and I do not know the man that is responsible for bringing me. He is a sperm donor, that is how I look at it. But ... I’m getting older and wiser. I’m more cool ... I’m not in any more rage ... I need to know my father!

His aunt (a family organizer) suggested he visit her in the U.S. and then his father in the U.K. So, in 2004 after gathering some savings, he flew to St Croix (U.S. Virgin Islands) to see a paternal brother, to America to visit several aunts, and finally to London, to meet and spend ‘four glorious weeks’ with his father. He and his father’s (re)encounter in Heathrow airport was powerfully affecting. Following his landing and an unsuccessful attempt to use U.S. dollars to buy a machine-issued bus ticket to his maternal uncle’s place (where he planned to stay before visiting his father), Mr Scotland walked wearily back into the terminal,

So, I’m going back now, to de information desk. I’m hearing my name, ‘Al Scotland report to de information desk’ ... I’m seeing a fella standing, facing away from me, and something jus’ tell me, ‘Quick, this is him!’ First time I was seeing him as an adult. At the same time [that] I see him and I’m walking towards him ... something tell him, ‘Hey!’ Because he’s looking at ‘arrivals’, but I had come from there already .... He jus’ turn! When he see me ... he had a newspaper under his arm, he jus’ drop it. He jus’ grab me and he began to cry. I held him away from me and I tell him, ‘look partner I didn’t come here for dat’, and I hug him again. He tell me am I hungry. I say, ‘no I’m not hungry’. I tell him I’m contented, that the man that have the responsibility for bringing me here, I meet him!

122 To ‘know’ someone is to meet and become acquainted with them. But to ‘know’ a new family member is to incorporate them into a network of kin that, once sustained through periodic contact, may be called upon when the need arises for economic support, to provide accommodation when travelling or offer a particular form of expertise (e.g., legal advice) (for an analogous Caribbean-wide phenomenon concerning non-kin see Carnegie’s concept of ‘strategic flexibility’ 1982).
Mr Scotland never explicitly articulated what told him ‘Quick, this is him!’, nor exactly what seized his father’s attention and urged him to suddenly turn. Neither did he hazard to explain what could have caused the serendipitous sequence of the whole episode. Yet given Dominican ideas about the numinous power of blood to ‘speak’ and render relatedness apparent, it is fair to surmise that the unifying idea of shared blood may be the ‘something’ that drew them together (for more on ‘blood speaking’ see chapter 4). The unifying blood principle was rendered visible through physical continuities which, once emphasized, bridged the disjunctures of paternal abandonment:

I doh know why, for some reason immediately we clicked. Because ... when he reached home he call his sister, he tell his sister when he went to the airport he jus’ saw himself walking towards him. Because he find I looks very much like him.

In the context of the existential emplacement implied by meeting a long-lost father, emphasis on physical likeness as a gloss for common blood provided the foundation of their shared kinship. This foregrounding of likeness/blood enabled kin-lives spent apart to be folded back, covering (though not disregarding) absence, and exposing as ultimately significant the physiological basis of paternal relatedness. Such a kinship foundation provided firm ground from which to develop close bonds into the future.

Mr Scotland and his father now speak almost daily on the phone. He told me that a paternal brother in England ‘cannot understand dat kind of relationship me and my fada have and we didn’t know each other ... he raise with him and he doesn’t have that kind of relationship’. As another grandfather with a similar story commented, ‘you know the relationship between me and my father is like I grow with him ... me and him very very close. Trust me’. Like Mr Scotland, this man shared with an elder father he came to know in later life an as if concept of their relationship. That is, a connection so close that they psychically recast the past – as if spent together – to make sense of an intimate shared present and future. Hence the bridging of lives lived apart enables a closeness, a fond continuity of being that, in fact, ironically may not have been the case – as revealed by Mr Scotland’s brother, and will be demonstrated in the following section – if his father was ‘on island’ or ‘present’.
As Fathers

I always maintain that every generation after me have to come stronger!

- Young man talking with friends, Rosea

The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father.

- Ezekiel 18:20

The idea of intergenerational progress, giving one’s children opportunities in life that one did not have growing up, is a widespread ethic that motivates parental duty and sacrifice throughout Dominica (and around the world). This idea produced in many of my interlocutors an individual moral drive to ‘play their part’ when they became fathers, providing for their children (school books, fees, shoes, snacks and clothes) as their fathers before them had failed to do. Mr Scotland asserted, ‘I was raised without a father, but I decided I did not want my children to raise without a fada … it was an aban-don-ment! You cannot abandon your children so! That is why I am so happy that I never abandoned any of my children’.

Steadfast in their refusal to visit the sins of their fathers upon their children, most of the men were deeply committed to ‘being there’ as fathers in the material sense. Many resisted the urge to unsustainably have ‘children all about’, as was valorised amongst their father’s generation, signifying virility and contributing to a man’s reputation as a sexually prolific ‘hot boy’. Inevitably, the men’s conjugal circumstance (relations to ‘child-mothers’), number of children and the vagaries of Dominica’s peripheralized economy – where wages were/are low and jobs few - conditioned their capacities to materially ‘care’ for their children. However, for the most part they were able to ‘do what they had to do’, surpassing the material shortcomings of their fathers before them.

Nonetheless, with age, experience and reflection, combined with an awareness of changing ideas about ‘responsible fatherhood’ that have emerged since they initially became fathers in the 1970s and 1980s (fatherhood as a personally significant life condition, as opposed to fathering as simply siring children; see chapter 5), some of the men reflected that they ‘could have taken more of an interest’ in their children. Commitments to ‘liming’, working and generally spending time ‘outside’ (of the family home); in addition to their distant disciplinarian posture within the conjugal home,
rendered many of the fathers self-admitted ‘absent-present fathers’. This ambivalent idiom connotes a father who is physically present and conjugally cohabiting, even married, yet emotionally remote. Both Mr Cuffy and Mr Pierre are men who embodied and transcended this label in their own way.

Mr Cuffy and Mr Pierre

Mr Cuffy, is a charismatic police inspector, father-of-two and grandfather-of-four, who never knew his father. He reflected back on his life as a married man more oriented towards the outside world than his conjugal family, remarking,

I cannot attribute that to work ... there’s a time you leave work, so you have to be with the family. So you’re out liming... you’re drinking, you know. You’re in the world ... you [only] come [home] to sleep... you put a liddle money in the home or you give the wife a liddle money and you think that’s it. That does not mek you a father. That does not mek you a father!

Mr Cuffy admitted that he wended his way through his early fathering, doing the basics without reflecting much on his paternal role. But with age, he and others I spoke with became more self-reflexive. Many silently ‘took stock’ of past iniquities, as one adult daughter put it, seeking to make amends in later life. Speaking with her decreasingly distant elder father in mind she added,

So I think when we get older, so much reflection is done, because that’s all you get to do, you’re retired and so a lot of reflection is done. A lot of introspection. I guess people see the error of their ways along life, and decide to make a change on it’.

My observations echo this daughter’s argument that experienced elder fathers reflect on their past fathering misdeeds, and many move, as Cuffy suggests, from being ‘in the world’ (a Biblical idiom connoting a life led by carnal desires – drinking by the road, ‘running woman’) towards a life at home, more oriented to children and other kin.
Similarly, Mr Pierre (now retired) was a senior ranking police officer\textsuperscript{123}. Unlike Mr Cuffy, however, Pierre was never much of a ‘limer’. Rather, ‘I was too much in love with my job, I gave too much time to my job’, he soberly stated as he recalled the shortcomings of his relationship to his now deceased first wife and three children. He elaborated, ‘I don’t think necessarily that I was negligent, but I failed to spend the time that I should have. So to some degree I feel that I cheated my children, you know, of my presence in their lives, of the attention that I should have given them’.

Mr Pierre is now sixty-eight, he remarried and has a ten-year-old son. Like many of the serial fathers I spoke to who had children with multiple women across the span of their lives, the experience they gained from their earlier fathering, along with their changing life circumstances and shifting societal ideas, led them to approach elder fathering differently. Elaborating this notion of a changing fatherly self, Diamond writes that ‘the ageing father must ... more fully embrace previously rejected gendered dimensions of himself by giving way to the expressive, connective and disclosing modes of his being’ (1998: 289). Although written of a US context, I would contend that this is also the case for Dominican men who by elder life are no longer concerned with earning ‘respect’ from peers – spending time on ‘the block’, ‘liming’, fighting, spearfishing or indeed working. Their ‘respect’ has been achieved, their lives are more economically stable (often just having a single child in older age) Their conjugal relationships are usually less antagonistic and all-in-all they are more ‘experience’ in life. Hence, as fathers they often become less authoritarian and more attentive towards their children.

Mr Pierre is currently a full-time father, staying at home while his wife works at an office in town. He cooks his son’s meals, prays with him morning and night, picks him up from school, assists with his homework and takes him for transinsular drives on weekends. Mr Pierre’s first son from his previous marriage drowned during his teens. Reflecting on his past and present fatherly selves he solemnly compared his relationship to his two boys:

\textsuperscript{123} Interestingly, he told me once that police officers are ‘some of the worst offenders’ when it comes to having ‘children all about’ and not ‘maintaining’ them. Thus, to be speaking with multiple police officers about settling down and becoming reoriented towards kin seemed apt.
It became clearer and clearer to me that the relationship that I have built with my young son is far better and far deeper than what I had with my first son, who died tragically. I just thank God, every day that he had given me an opportunity to do better. I am thankful that at this time in my life I’m retired from the police service but I’m full-time in fathering, and I thank God for that opportunity. For me it’s like a second chance.

Mr Pierre’s redemptive later-life fatherhood is more overtly demonstrative than his earlier fathering. He interprets this opportunity for a ‘second chance’ at fatherhood as divine providence. His contemporary fathering is also more explicitly tender than that of his father before him. ‘I don’t recall one day my parents telling me that they love me ... I just knew. It didn’t trouble me to think about’, he stated during our second life-history interview, highlighting the love so evidently expressed by their parenting labour. At the end of the interview as we get into his car to drop me home he called his son to inform him that he would be back late. Before hanging up he casually signed-off the call with a gentle reminder – ‘love you’ – two simple words evincing the contrast between his dad’s fathering, that of his younger self and his contemporary paternal practice.

As Grandfathers

_Becoming Papa_

_Papa_ is a term of respect; a status that evokes a quiet, gentle, even playful patriarchal presence in a home or family setting. While in the neighbouring ‘French islands’ _papa_ means father, in Dominica it is the deferential address of a grandchild to a grandfather (_pé_ being Dominican _kweyol_ for an immediate father). In the context of kin networks that span Dominica and its francophone neighbours, this play between _papa_ as father and grandfather is perhaps more than mere ethnological nuance. Rather, it mirrors the overlapping generationality mentioned above, and, as I will demonstrate, _papa_’s proximity to grandchildren.

When I first visited my grandfather’s rural village of Colihaut at the start of my fieldwork, just six months after his passing, I recognized a common classificatory slippage in grandfather-grandchild referents. My grandfather’s friends and extended kin referred to me as _zanfan pou Mendes_ (‘child for Mendes’) or ‘Mendes’ son’. Despite my frequent reminders that Mendes was actually my grandfather, I would continue to overhear comments such as, ‘he looking jus’ like his fada, _wil_’, as I passed elders on the road. I came to realize that although a child will call their grandfather _papa_
or ‘grandpa’, he will often refer to them as ‘my child’. Similarly, to third parties (e.g. elder villagers) grandchildren are also ‘his children’.

Querying this, I asked Mr Scotland why he makes no nominal distinction between his immediate children and grandchildren. He explained, ‘there’s no distinction ... because what they saying is his product. Because without him your fada wouldn’t be there for you to be there’. Hence, any descending child in a man’s lineage – whether direct progeny, ‘grand-’, or ‘great-grand-’ – becomes ‘his child’. A man’s name ideally ‘lives on’ through his children: both literally through a ‘family name’ (surname) and figuratively through his patrimony, descendants’ memories of him and local tales told of his public persona by friends and family (as told to me about my grandfather). This idea of living on through kin, or ‘vicarious ego expansion’ as Blake termed it amongst Jamaican fathers (1961: 192), resonates in Dominica whereby ‘putting children on de earth’ offers men a semblance of individual immortality. Since ‘they came from your being’, as Scratchie once framed it, children ensure a senescent man, cognizant of his encroaching ‘day of reckoning’, an enduring presence in the lived world; or, like Mr Pierre, a chance at redemption. Partly for this reason elder Dominican men express a sincere fondness toward their grandchildren, which the dyadic term ‘my child’ embodies.

This notwithstanding, Mr Scotland adds a historical explanation, highlighting that post-war parental emigration to England in the 1950s and 1960s resulted in many children of his generation growing up in Dominica with their grandparents. As such, he says, a mutual closeness developed, resulting in grandparents calling grandchildren ‘their children’. According to Mr Greggs, a Rasta, artist and grandfather from Newtown (a community between Roseau and Loubiere), grandparents have a ‘special love for de gran-child’ and see them as being ‘for dem’. The child ‘is a gift. It is an Ex-ten-sion, it’s a family extension, everybody does feel nice’, he adds, letting out a warm chuckle at the joy that interaction with grandchildren and their embodied expansion of the kindred brings to him and other grandparents. As ‘gifts’ children represent for many grandfathers an entertaining and vibrant continuity of self, a spiritual ‘extension’ of one’s mortal being into the future.
That said, while a grandfather’s immediate progeny and grandchildren are indeed both ‘his children’, he will often act differently towards them during their respective childhoods, becoming more lenient towards the grandchild. Mr Greggs commented that children often,

\[\text{Have greeaat liberty wiv de grandparent! Yeah, [more] dan de direc’ offspring ‘ave. They’re a kind of a softer-, sometimes your moda and fada will be more hard wiv you, more stric’, and de grandparents will go down to allow you to get free. Yeah, de grandchildren can do a lot of liddle mess up fings an’ it’s taken for granted, ‘oh, let de chil’ren play’ … Not that one wants their grandchildren to go astray, but is a soft[-ening], you know. Because maybe more age and more knowledge and so on.}\]

Interestingly, while Caribbean fathers are normatively represented as the final arbitrators of familial discipline (discussed in chapter 4), as grandfathers this role is often inverted. Grandmothers are reported as the more punitive grandparent (Henriques 1953: 197), while grandfathers – growing more placid and freed from immediate paternal imperatives – can become figures of fun, play and affection, particularly towards young grandchildren. Such a transgenerational shift in parental practice is revealing of the gendered distinctiveness of grandparent roles as they are repositioned through senescence.

Take Annie, a daughter in her forties. She remembered her father as a staunch and authoritarian doctor; but observed a gentler, warmer and more permissive grandfather:

\[\text{Things that my father never did with me he does with my children, and I am amazed! The first time I remember my father kissing me on my cheek I was fifteen. And I can’t remember any other emotional physical contact with him other than that. But my kids are all over him. They’re on his bed, they’re jumping on him – we wouldn’t dare do this as children! I mean it’s just unimaginable.}\]

Similarly, Beaver (nicknamed for his prominent teeth), a Rastaman in his thirties who lives with his common-law wife and eight-year-old daughter, noted that Val, his widower father, is less strict and more playful towards his granddaughter than he was with Beaver:
To me, plenty of fings you as de child could never escape wiv, she escaping wiv it ... They have that ability from that time [i.e., the present time], they can almost do what dey want and dey getting away wid it scotch free. Whereas you now, dem times dere [i.e., before], had no time! Get away with what?! Shteuppssss! [kisses teeth]. You’d get blows in your ass and you’d get blows in your ass! ... I believe it’s a game to him now. It’s an amusement park!

With the primary responsibility of ‘correction’ falling to the direct parents, grandchildren can become a source of entertainment and companionship to grandfathers in their playful daily interactions (as Beaver and Annie suggest). Mr Scotland added that interactions such as carrying his two grandsons under each arm during their weekend visits ‘make me feel younger’. Emphasizing the personal importance of their fun-filled exchanges, he added that were it not for his grandchildren ‘I would probly say, “you know, [it] is time for me to leave, is time for me to go” [i.e pass away]. But now, as if they bring more zeal to my life. My grandchildren are what I’m living for’. Thus, children often bring feelings of vitality.

For many elder men who follow a stoic ‘work-home’ daily routine – between their workplace, provision ‘garden’ and the yard/veranda/house – affectionate interaction with grandchildren at home offers a contrast with the more boisterous sociality of men in ‘outside’ spaces/workplaces. Advancing a respectable moral concept of self-worth\textsuperscript{124} - preferring not to linger on the road or ‘interfere’ (mingle) with a present generation of ‘young fellas’ described by one elder as, ‘always in pwoblem’ (fighting, drinking or smoking (ganja)’ - senescent men spend less time ‘outside’ with peers and more at home with kin.

Amongst Dominican men I observed an impulse towards being ‘outside’ and free to roam from what is considered the symbolically feminine domain of the home. Thus, spending increasing time at home elder men experience an ambivalent sense of inside-ness, paradoxically feeling only partially ‘at home’ in the home. Hence the interstitial spaces of the yard and the veranda, at once

\textsuperscript{124} Reminiscent of the African-American café regular’s concept of respectability in Mitchell Duneier’s Chicago-based ethnography \textit{Slim’s Table} (1992: 65-86).
‘outside’ but not public, become spaces of elder male dwelling. The former is a productive space of male ‘yard work’, the latter a gender-neutral space for watching the passing world and yarning with visitors. Furthermore, such yarns often imaginatively transport elder men through time and space as they tell tall tales of overseas sojourns, local feats (e.g. on the sea or the football savannah), criminal adventures and sexual escapades during their younger, more virile manhood. All this, in the act of recital, attests to their experience of the world and their secured reputations therein; thus mitigating the existential displacement of becoming ‘homely’ in old age.

Gus’s Ambivalent Homeliness

The threshold between inner and outer was a site for intense struggle and friction, for men could not live with work alone, yet nor could they remain for long in the private world of the family without feeling a sense of identity loss and invalidation. (Rutherford 1992: 17–18).

Gus is the husband of a maternal aunt of mine. He is a quiet security guard aged sixty, father-of-one, beau pé of three and grandfather-of-six. He is especially close to his youngest granddaughter (aged three) who lives in their bayside home along with his adult daughters, other granddaughters and wife. He works long hours and spends most of his waking time at work, home, or in his yard\textsuperscript{125}, tending his animals (rabbits, chickens, dogs), cutting coconuts, picking fruit or doing odd jobs. On Fridays when he comes from working late he will coolly tell the family ‘goodnight’ as he meets them watching T.V. in the living room while his wife works (e.g. cleaning fish or making juice) in the kitchen or resting. He then lovingly lifts and cuddles his youngest granddaughter, typically nestling a kiss in her neck before she wriggles free and goes about her business. Gus is an almost silent and seemingly peripheral figure in the home, offering only short, functional conversation (about food, clothes to be washed, working hours) with his adult daughters and wife. Yet, he becomes more vocal in exchanges with his granddaughter, playfully encouraging her to tell him about her day or unconvincingly threatening her ‘not to do that’ and ‘go there’ or she will get a spanking (that rarely ever comes) as she mischievously runs away from

\textsuperscript{125} It is ‘mumum’s house’, whilst it’s ‘papa’s yard’.
him, laughing. On Sundays when he is off work and not in the yard he usually sits to watch cricket or Westerns on the sofa or a comforter on the floor with his two youngest granddaughters, before invariably falling asleep as the children play or doze beside him (see Fig 41). Though never expressed in conversation, it is observable that Gus enjoys the company and warmth that his grandchildren bring him.

One afternoon sitting with Gus on his veranda, I asked how his life has changed since becoming a grandfather. He said he does not go out as much as he used to: spearfishing with his brother and friends, bodybuilding with another group, or just ‘pulling up’ and chatting with a fellow security guard at a nearby gas station during the man’s night shift. Now he spends most of his time working, at home or in his yard. After pausing for a moment, he asserted, ‘I begin to realise, it’s not good to be too homey you know. When you homey, the day you go out everybody have to try and find out, “Why you out late? Where you going? What you doing?”’. He was referring to his wife and daughters – used to his routine presence at home – whose concerned questions, he felt, nag at his autonomy.

Figure 41 - Gus’s Sunday nap with his granddaughter

220
Furthermore, he added that the children ‘can be so noisy’, often making his ears hurt. Hence, he retreating each afternoon to the tranquility of his animals and shaded seaside yard. Our conversation then drifted back to spearfishing. He lit up, losing his usual coolness as he entered an exhilarating story of a diving adventure off Dominica’s southwestern tip. He described jumping on his friend’s motorbike, spear gun in hand, flippers and snorkel in his pack, and off they went. He mentioned encounters with sharks, his ability to hold his breath longer than his peers and the big catches they would proudly return with, carrying a laden kwaye (fish wire) advertising an array of seafood as they sped home along the coastal road. ‘Back then we never bought fish from the market’, he proudly stated, echoing the nostalgic remarks I would often hear Auntie make about his productive fishing days. Then, he wistfully proclaimed, though more to himself than me, ‘I want to go back to it’. His retrospective tale had evoked the satisfaction felt by a roving former self. However, although it brought about an observable feeling of loss, the very act of sharing his story of adventure, danger and catching a bounty of fish for his wife and children, testified to his past competence, technical skill and qualified sense of masculine being in the outside world of men. Gus’s imaginative retrospective journey into his personal history served to bring his sense of achievement in that world into the present. As his audience – a young and itinerant male who is ‘of outside’ in a very general sense – I sat captivated, intently absorbing the vivid oral re-enactment of his tale. Gus’s telling and my hearing not only reinforced his reputation, but asserted it as a resource to mitigate the feelings of displacement produced by his ambivalently ‘inside’, senescent life.

Conclusion

In the series of biographic sketches presented in this chapter I have sought to retrieve the kinship lives of elder men from the interstices of Caribbean ethnography. Locating sons, fathers and grandfathers at various points of disjuncture, distance or intimacy throughout paternal life histories, I have synthesized a general, though complicated, picture of ageing inward movement. Such deceleratory motion has social, spatial, temporal and affective implications as senescent men dwell with greater frequency in the home, yard and on the veranda; and move into closer relations with young kin. ‘Absences’ and successful later-life reunions with emigrant fathers; determination to disrupt cycles of absence yet unintentionally becoming ‘absent-present’ fathers in the process; pursuing paternal redemption with age; developing a special love, leniency and
playful relations with grandchildren yet expressing ambivalence towards one’s increasing homeliness – have all patterned the fathering trajectories documented here. The composite gendered tale I have sketched is one of existential orientation and reference: initially, towards peers, work, liming, the block and the outside world; and eventually, towards children, grandchildren, kinship and the dissonant inside-ness of home life mediated by memories of a virile past. Yet, amidst this reorientation, ambivalences have endured and emerged. Even as ‘experienced’ (grand)fathers the journey is often far from simple.

Gaining an intergenerational view of men’s kinship biographies has offered a picture of how past and future are experienced and comprehended in familial terms. What has emerged from observation and narrative across the three generational moments is that a strong existential connection to progenic kin (children and grandchildren) develops as a man grows through fatherhood and grandfatherhood. I have framed this increasingly significant sense of connection as a *continuity of being* between kin. For the individual men I came to know, who identified their antecedent paternal pasts (e.g., ‘knowing the man who put you there’) and descendent progenic futures (e.g., grandchildren being ‘extensions’) as existentially significant to their lived present, this idiom expresses the increasing personal importance of direct lineage and kinship with age. Therefore, far from being peripheral appendages to Dominican families, grandfathers move in complex and ambivalent ways along senescent paths, towards an ideal of intergenerational alignment and familial togetherness.
Conclusion:
Absence, Death and Paternal Becoming

In closing, I come full-circle in both the lifecourse of the father and my ethnographic journey with a brief discussion of death and departure. My intention here is to show how the death of a father and my departure from fieldwork paradoxically reveal the social generativity and continuities of ‘absence’. This troubling of absence then leads me into a final reflection on the various ways this ethnography has complicated narratives of the dead father and documented Dominican men’s everyday familial becoming. Here I consolidate Fathermen’s core arguments, before closing with some tentative recommendations.

The life of death

The three sisters talk and laugh as they sponge down their father... The sons arrive and together they dress him in a white shirt and pinstripe suit, sent by the daughter in Canada... Padee’s children’s voices compete with scattered memories about their father, most of them never saw enough of him, never knew him well. All they have are the pieces of stories their respective mothers told them, the few stories he told them... As they place the body in the coffin, their voices join, piecing together the different versions of stories... Their bodies wrack with laughter and tears stream down their cheeks. The porter enters and asks, “Is party oonuh [you] come to party or fi bury oonuh [your] dead”. They burst out laughing...

- Palmer-Adisa 2007, Sun Song

In death there is life. This is a truism of Caribbean societies, where death rituals are not only occasions for mourning and grief, but also for sociality and community-making (Olwig 2009; Hope 2010; Wardle 2000; Guilbault 1987). Caribbean funerals are reunions of sorts. Disparately scattered relatives and friends come from ‘town’, ‘country’ and ‘de foreign’ to celebrate and reminisce on the lives of their deceased (as Jamaican writer Opal Palmer-Adisa shows above). Häkönens (2011) argues of Cuba that men’s funerals are especially significant in kinship terms,
often drawing distant fathers more tightly into families than they ever were in life (by contrast to mothers’ presence throughout). Similarly, Dominican funerals as moments of avowed togetherness, enable fathers who may have had strained relations with their children to receive a proper send off. As events for collectively memorialising departing ancestors and recognising the loss of those who ‘survive’ them (particularly, through daily death announcements on Dominican radio and TV) funerals operate as rituals of kinship generativity and renewal.

Figure 42 Mendes’ Funeral booklet

My mother met her brother for the very first time at her father’s funeral. After 51 years of life, only vaguely aware that her father had an ‘outside’ elder child and never having seen his photograph or heard his name, they would casually meet for the first time at the graveside. She also
encountered cousins she had not sighted since the 80s, in addition to uncles and aunts she had not been acquainted with previously. ‘Wass Ahosay people’ (Race of Ahosay - as our extended clan is known, after an area of ‘family land’ in the village heights) descended on Colihaut from places as far flung as Bristol, The Bronx, Antigua and New Jersey to pay their final respects to Peter ‘Oncle Mendes’ Philogene. These included my mum and her new older brother, both with their complicated relationships to their late father, brought together by his physical absence.

Months later, my arrival in Colihaut brought stories of my grandfather to the minds of his elder friends. As a ‘hot boy’ with an eye for women; as a ‘very generous man’ who bought children of the village their first school shoes; as a ‘hard headed’ and stern man who always shared his uncompromising views, particularly with those he disapproved of. I came to know him perhaps almost as well as any of the living fathers and grandfathers discussed in the preceding pages of this thesis. I knew him both through the loving narratives of his friends/kin and through the less flattering tales of those whose tongues had been freed by his passing. In sum, both familial reunions at funerals and reminiscences to a grandson thereafter, demonstrate kinship vitality in death.

_Diasporic Departures and Not ‘Forgetting’_

Dominicans place great emphasis on the interpersonal ethic of ‘not forgetting’ each other. ‘Forgetting’ represents the neglect of a relationship to a family member, friend or loved one. It is seen as a form of active disregard. Disregard of shared histories, past acts of kindness, close bonds and relationship duties. Most notable of such duties is to ‘check’ – regularly call, visit and send gifts for a relative or friend, to enquire about their wellbeing and sustain a regular relational presence in their lives. ‘Checking’ is not so much about the qualitative content of an exchange (which may be quite mundane), it is about regular contact, co-presence and sharing. Failure to ‘check’ a significant relative or friend is a moral affront to the relationship. ‘W’hapen you forget me, man?’, an individual may accuse when encountering a friend or family member they have not heard from in ‘the longest while’; to which the respondent must swiftly deny the inexcusable, and change the subject, refusing to be labelled as someone who neglects their kin/friends.

---

126 Note the contrast here between my knowledge of grandma (chapter 1) which came through my mother’s narratives, and my knowledge of Mendes through those his peers and extended consanguines.
In early 2014 when I told friends and family that I had to leave Dominica to complete my studies, I was issued a series of reminders. From a football teammate and friend: ‘don’t forget us when you’re up back up dere’; from a cousin, about an elder aunt in Colihaut: ‘Auntie Vernie, make sure you don’t forget her, eh’; and from a middle-aged friend and father, a take-away statement: ‘To be absent from the country is to be absent from the mind. You know distance always causes people to forget…’. Having become an everyday participant in the lives of my Dominican family members and friends, I learnt that despite my physical departure I was expected, as all diasporic Dominicans are, to maintain an extra-local psychic presence on ‘island’. Much like grandma to her eldest daughters ‘left behind’, I was to be ‘out of state but still in mind’ (Seller 2005). Therefore, such reminders about not forgetting, operated as a kind of centring reflex amongst residents of a small ‘peripheral’ island (Baker 1994) disposed to emigration; aimed to keep those who depart ever-oriented to their ‘home’.

Utilising skype, WhatsApp and social media platforms I have since leaving endeavoured to heed the reminders and practice the ethic by continuing an ongoing dialogue with aunts, cousins and friends. I have sent packages containing school shoes and football jerseys; and received boxes with cocoa tea, fresh spices and pepper sauce. Following the devastation of Tropical Storm Erika (December 2015), I raised funds for an aunt to repair flood damage to her home. I sent support when Scratchie damaged his back and was unable to work; and have been sent photos and skyped with his 2-year-old grandson, also my godson.

However, this extra-local presence has not always been easy to maintain. It was only upon my return to Dominica in the summer of 2014, after 4 months ‘off island’, that I became aware of the significance of my absence. Many of the Loubiere boys I had coached, each of them a little taller, shoulders broader, voices deeper, watched me with a quiet reservation when they first saw me again. They waited until I approached them to ask about their wellbeing, their schooling, their mothers’ health, their football before responding to me as someone familiar. It seemed they had felt abandoned when I stopped coaching them and nobody had taken my place. Passing me on the road Wendell, a tall lad of 14 asked, ‘so you back in de country [for a while] or you jus dere for de time?’ ‘Just a month’, I told him, resignedly adding that I had to return to university after summer. He appeared dejected. ‘When you start something you suppose to finish it’, the usually playful teenager scathed. During that trip I arranged a football tournament on the savannah and brought down engraved winners medals; perhaps little more than a plaster for a sore. ‘Your boys
miss you’, a mother of twins told me recently in reply to a message enquiring about her sons. My fraternal/avuncular mentor role, the joy of bus trips across the island to play against other villages and the everyday interest I had taken in their lives for over a year, came to be regarded as an enduring responsibility. I had ‘made myself’ in Dominica with little mind to my departure, until it came. Yet, here I reneged on my community role. My absence was felt beyond my expectation and I had little means of becoming present from afar.

Therefore, despite my departure, like many diasporic Dominicans I have been able to sustain a continuous extra-local presence in the lives of kin and close friends. Yet this had limits: my departure also brought discontinuities as I struggled to sustain my presence as coach and mentor in the lives of my junior peers.

**Absence Troubled: Predicaments Encountered**

This discussion of the kinship afterlife of my grandfather and the afterlife of my fieldwork has intended not only to provide a post-script on the lifecourse model of this thesis and the relations that produced it; the discussion also aims to trouble simple understandings of ‘absence’. Whether a (grand)father leaving the mortal-world or a friend/cousin/coach departing overseas, I have shown that these absences are far from absolute; they are both contingent and partial (Bille et al. 2012; Farrelly et al 2014). The same is true of the Caribbean father’s apparent ‘absence’. As I suggested in the introduction, the prevailing image of the black Caribbean father is that of absentia - ‘the dead father’ as I termed the stereotype. However, as I argued in the introduction this dispossessed and symbolically deceased father represents the negation of a second archetype, that of the white patriarchal father – he who had the means and status to authoritatively father. Negotiating these two mythic images are the real Caribbean men that have populated this thesis, grappling with competing paternal images as they move through life. These fathers, no matter how indifferent or ‘wotless’ (worthless, uncaring) they may seem, are seldom entirely ‘absent’. Typically, at his very worse a negligent Dominican father is referred to as ‘a father in name alone’ or a ‘sperm donor’; he who has contributed reproductive substance and a patronym, but little more. In his meditation on *Being and Nothingness* Sartre contended, ‘It is evident that non-being always appears within the limits of a human expectation’ (1957:7). Hence, absence in paternal terms is a figurative outline, a ‘negation’ of the ideal father who should be there, rather than complete nothingness. In chapter 4, this negation - as it is popularly presented
with regards to hegemonic provider ideals – is critiqued as the basis of ‘deficit norm making’,
defining fathers not by their actions themselves but by what they should do, yet fail to.

In the preceding pages, however, I have documented realities that go beyond simplistic popular
caricatures of absent or authoritarian fathering. Fathermen’s depictions transcend bipolar historic
archetypes of dispossessed black fathers and patriarchal white fathers, whilst also showing how
these spectres loom large in popular narratives and ideals. My goal has been to depict fathering
and men’s kinship experience in lived terms, through the interpersonal. Methodologically, I have
sought to convey the contradictions and complexities that emerge as practical realities rub against
official narratives as well as norms held by kin, friends and men themselves. Whilst endeavouring
to represent this cacophony of voices, my central project has been to understand how Dominican
men practically become fathers/kin. How they make their own foundations; how they build – then
often destabilise and remake - kinship from the ground up. This is the thesis’s intervention: that
fathers are not simply ‘present’ ‘or ‘absent’; they become, between such absolutes. My own social
self-making project in chapter one, was in some sense an initiation into a similar kind of existential
becoming – ‘making myself’ through relations. Subsequently, the methodological disposition that
emerged, a stance I call the ethnography of relation, afforded a dialogical route into this ground-
level everyday making of men. It offered a vantage for observant participation in men’s everyday
familial worlds and ‘reasoning’ about their quotidian concerns. In finding a social location from
which to experience and observe the intimate intricacies of kinship life, this thesis became
possible.

Fathermen’s core contention has been that Dominican men encounter numerous kinship
predicaments throughout their life journeys. They grow through, gain experience from and
become variously ‘tied’/‘untied’ at each juncture. Hence, it takes a lifetime to realise fathering, with
many not resolving its paradoxes within their mortal spans. Instead, they may reconcile them
intergenerationally (chapter 7) or after death (this chapter), if at all. Kinship predicaments are thus
analogue, transient and recurring. This I have demonstrated with each chapter. I showed how men
fall into, try to explain away, undo and then grow into conjugal love (chapter 2). How ‘legitimacy’
and putative paternity may be resolved temporarily through naming, then opened though subtle

---
127 Conceptualising kinship in its broadest sense here I include discussions of conjugal and romantic
relations/frictions.
bodily clues during pregnancy and infancy, and re-opened via mystical later-life invocations (chapter 3). I demonstrated how fathering is made through material provision and undone through its lack; made by mothers ‘who father’; and remains beyond reach for many men who opt out of ‘hand to mouth’ fathering (chapter 4). Likewise, I revealed how intimate and ‘hands on’ paternal practice may be hidden behind a veil of normative masculine silence, whilst paradoxically increasing in visibility (chapter 5). Then, I traced a working-class father’s redemptive journey towards a committed family-oriented life, showing how his pleas for recognition via masculine models of ‘respectability’ were denied as a result of colour/class chauvinisms (chapter 6). Finally, I revealed grandfatherhood and elder fatherhood as periods for reflection and familial re-orientation that spark existential ambivalences between ‘outside’ masculine memories and increasingly homely lives (chapter 7). Each of these predicaments – due to both choices made and the historic circumscriptions that informed them – deeply marked men’s individual kinship itineraries. These life journeys did not move men between ‘absence’ and ‘presence’, but through degrees of kinship proximity/distance. Such proximity/distance was expressed in bodies, affects, names, acts and idioms of recognition. Generally speaking, Fathermen has shown that paternal proximity increases as men progress along their life journeys, growing in fatherly experience and ‘respectability’; learning from past deeds. Yet, any straightforward linear movement towards elder family life is complicated by the social and economic exigencies of life. Thus, I have shown that much like Dominica’s physical landscape the contours of paternal becoming is far from smooth. Nevertheless, between hardship, quarrels and narratives of abdication, I have endeavoured to show the expressions of paternal love, intimacy and sacrifice that were routinely revealed to me as I witnessed men charting an array of kinship paths.

That said, this account has been far from exhaustive. Attempts to make it so only wound up in me exhausting myself during fieldwork as I continually pursued interviews with new interlocutors from all walks of life; bent on uncovering every detail that would be necessary to write an authoritative account of Fathermen’s oft neglected and vexed theme. Of course, I eventually realised this was futile; that blemishes and gaps in this ethnographic rendering were inevitable. And even when ‘writing up’, I was forced to cull chapters, reducing some of the breadth I had previously been determined to offer due to word limitations. Thus, chapters on youth (being ‘in the world’, between families of orientation and procreation) and avuncularity (the uncle’s adjacency to the father) had to be excluded. Similarly, significant fieldwork discussions on sibling relations and
familial abuse\textsuperscript{128} were also too difficult to do justice to and coherently situate within the thesis that has emerged. Therefore, this artefact of a particular ethnographic journey through a particular network of emergent relations, is inevitably partial and incomplete. Nonetheless, by methodologically privileging the voices of my interlocutors, alongside close observation of their lives, I believe that the preceding pages have nonetheless offered a rich moving portrait of kinship realities that will be familiar to much of the region. Caribbean colleagues and friends, from a range of locales ‘at home’ and in the diaspora, have expressed great interest in the ‘findings’ of this thesis. It is in response to this interest that I shall briefly close with a few tentative recommendations that grow from \textit{Fathermen’s} extended meditation on male kinship lives.

\textit{Some Suggestions}

\textit{Transcending deficit norms}

Throughout this thesis I have repeatedly returned to the tensions between ideals and norms – images of what fathers should be doing and reports of what they are, or in this case are not doing. In chapter 4 I concluded that it is problematic to judge Dominican fathers according to what they should do yet fail to, rather than by what they actually do within their field of capacities. The former I called ‘deficit norm making’, the act of conceiving of fathering in deficit terms. Thus, Dominican fathers are adjudged to be ‘absent’ or ‘missing’ because they fall short of lofty norms that are beyond their reach. This recommendation is a general one, for fathers, mothers, elders and children – the Caribbean at large – to move away from narratives of absentia, the dead father and missing men. This is not to ignore paternal shortcomings, but to challenge the depiction of Caribbean fatherhood as an oxymoron; the Antilles as a place without fathers. For this narrative seems to only reinforce such a doxa. Deficit norms are perhaps self-fulfilling. They sit within the consciousness of fathers, future fathers and child-mothers, creating an atrophy of expectation, an inaccessible image of good fathering and thus the possibility of indifference. The kinds of questions you ask inform the answers you are likely to receive – to presuppose absence is perhaps to invite it. This does not excuse the iniquities of uncaring fathers; but encourages the Caribbean

\textsuperscript{128}Interestingly, at the time of writing this issue has come to the fore in local gender activism with a social media campaign called \#LÉVÉDOMNIK (‘Wake up Dominica’), anonymously publishing stories of sexual abuse by fathers, stepfathers, brothers, elder cousins and catholic ‘fathers’ (priests) on girl children. The aim has been to lift the veil on this oft silenced topic of familial sexual abuse. Ethnographic research in this area is urgently necessary.

230
and its diaspora to see fathers as they are, taking what they do instead of what they fail to as a starting point for encouraging more. This brings me to my second suggestion, which is directed more towards NGOs and activists working with Caribbean fathers.

Preaching ‘good sense’ fathering

Throughout my time in Dominica I was invited by CariMAN, UN Women and local NGOs to speak to men about ‘Positive Fatherhood’. This mantle to preach reform often provoked discomfort in me as it felt distinctly colonial. What could I, a childless young ‘Englishman’ with no direct fatherhood experience, possibly tell Dominican men of all ages about how they should be/act as fathers? Accustomed to hearing refrains from priests and parliamentarians decrying Dominican paternal fecklessness, I sought another route. I turned my ethnographic reflections over to the men to whom I was speaking; asking them about everyday features of their fathering then proffering a discussion of my emerging research themes – e.g. embodied paternity, men’s everyday small acts of child care, the sacrifices of providing for children. In this I aimed to tease out unexamined progressive aspects of Dominican paternal practice. I sought to draw out what Gramsci calls ‘good sense’ - a counter-hegemonic dimension of everyday ‘common sense’ understandings of the world. Thus, together we invoked the ‘good sense’ aspects of Dominican paternal practice. By challenging tired refrains of fathers as either absent or patriarchal, I sought to bring other often disregarded, though nonetheless valuable, features of fathering into our discussion. Such praxis can be applied, therefore, as a suggestion of this thesis for NGOs and other practitioners working with Caribbean families: to use the narratives and observations featured here to inspire a ‘good sense’ approach to supporting Caribbean families. One that meets families where they are and elaborates existing practices that promote the wellbeing of kin; not one guided only by external or antiquated ideals. Hence, of ‘good sense’, which he called a ‘philosophy implicit in practical life’, Gramsci suggested,

Elaborating it [good sense] so that it becomes a renewed common sense possessing the coherence and sinew of individual philosophies. But this can only happen if the demands of cultural contact with the "simple" are continually felt’ (Gramsci 1971:330n).

Hence, any program promoting particular examples of fatherhood, should remain grounded in local realities and pertinent to people’s lived experiences of the world. It should remain attentive
not just to dominant ‘expert’ ideas in Northern child psychology or social work, but also evolving Caribbean notions of what makes a good parent both ‘at home’ and in the diaspora.

Maintenance court reform

Finally, a brief comment on one way the state may better respond to fathers. The main means through which the state attempts to deal with ‘irresponsible fathers’ – i.e. men who ‘don’t pay for their children’ - is via the legal system. This is problematic, notes UWI law lecturer Tracey Robinson, for the court functions to only ‘recognise men with wallets’ as fathers (Dominica News Online, 2011). Given what I have argued in this thesis, I am inclined to agree with Robinson as this maintenance-oriented approach reinforces a narrow provider role, excluding the various normative and non-normative caring functions I have depicted (i.e. hands on care, guidance, correction and protection). I heard periodic calls throughout fieldwork from politicians and citizens for the government to pursue absconding fathers with more punitive force (e.g. headline: ‘“Fathers, take care of your children or face the law”, says education minister’, Dominica News Online, March 2012) and to begin deducting maintenance from salaries at the time of payment (Dominica News Online, March 2011). Yet, the former calls have had little impact on the numbers of fathers being pursued by the courts; and the latter reforms never materialised. Therefore, even in its narrow pursuit of paternal provision, the underfunded court system often fails to secure payment from renegade fathers - much to many mothers’ and the magistrate’s frustrations.

I would thus encourage readers to take seriously the repeated calls of Dominican Magistrate Gloria Augustus for a ‘long overdue’ Dominican Family court to be established. Such a facility would offer a mediation rather than adversarial approach to family matters/disputes (‘maintenance’, custody, parental access, fostering, juvenile matters); and incorporate social workers and counsellors into its holistic approach to familial resolutions (Dominica News Online, September 2010; March 2016; see too Robinson 2000). Although at present the Magistrate encourages co-parenting (lambasting parents who use the possessive pronoun when referring to a mutual child), encourages paternal contact (‘check your child nuh man!’) and discourages the use of children as pawns in parental battles, this progressive and proactive stance can only do so much to effect parenting in lieu of the structural reform. In the interest of fathering, a family court might support paternal contact with children and ameliorate parental frictions, to better draw men into relation with their children and alliance with their child-mothers. Thus, funding for a comprehensive review of the
current familial court provision could be sought via the ‘United Nations Trust fund on Family Activities’ to ascertain current gaps in the court system; with reviewers then delivering its findings to the Dominican Parliament for debate.
Bibliography


o Henriques, F. (1953) *Family and Colour in Jamaica*. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode,


239


Matthews, B. (1953). Crisis of the West Indian family: A sample study. Jamaica: Extra Mural Department of the University College of the West Indies.


o The Guardian (July 16th 2008) ‘Cameron: absent black fathers must meet responsibilities’ Online [Stable URL] [Accessed 10/10/15]


Appendix

Appendix A Caribbean family planning photos

Figure 43 - ‘Plan Your Family’ (Caribbean Family Planning Affiliation, date unknown)
Figure 44 - “And please help us find our father” (Caribbean Family Planning Affiliation, date unknown)
Where's the father?

It takes a man and a woman to make a child.

It takes a man and a woman to see that this child grows up in a home that is filled with love, care and understanding.

Men, don't neglect your children. Preserve the health of their mother by doing your best to lessen the worry and overwork on her part. Children need fathers.

They need your love, your care and your presence. This is Family Planning. All it is, is caring enough to do all you can to better your family life. Family Planning is having a heart.

NATIONAL FAMILY PLANNING BOARD

Figure 45 – ‘Where’s the father? Have a heart’ (Caribbean Family Planning Affiliation, date unknown)
Figure 46 – ‘Fathers also plan their families’ (Caribbean Family Planning Affiliation, date unknown)
Figure 47 – ‘A child – A life: A father’s responsibility’ (Caribbean Family Planning Affiliation, date unknown)