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When Wives Migrate and Leave Husbands Behind: A Jamaican Marriage Pattern

Elaine B. Douglas-Harrison

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WHEN WIVES MIGRATE AND LEAVE HUSBANDS BEHIND:
A JAMAICAN MARRIAGE PATTERN

by

ELAINE DOUGLAS-HARRISON

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

WHEN WIVES MIGRATE AND LEAVE HUSBANDS BEHIND: A JAMAICAN MARRIAGE PATTERN

by

Elaine Douglas-Harrison

Adviser: Professor Cynthia Fuchs Epstein

For over a hundred years Jamaicans have been migrating to make the proverbial ‘better life’ for themselves and their families. In the early 20th century husbands migrated, leaving wives behind. As economies of the United States and Canada have become more service-oriented, wives migrate leaving husbands behind. The experiences of Jamaican immigrant women are documented in Caribbean migration studies, but the marriages of Jamaican legally-married immigrant wives and their husbands left behind in Jamaica are so far unstudied. The main research question of this study is what maintains these transnational marriages over time, sometimes for decades, when spouses see each other sometimes only once or twice a year. Data for the study come from: in-depth interviews conducted between 2005 and 2007; conversations held over the past fifteen years with participants in these marriages in the United States and in Jamaica; and participant observation of U.S. and Jamaican societies. The findings reveal that daily companionship in marriage is not as essential a Jamaican cultural value as migration, but that the institution of marriage, although not the dominant form of coupling in Jamaica, is important enough to last. Moreover, divorce still bears a stigma in Jamaican culture. Outcomes of these marriages vary but may not be unpredictable, depending on their pre-migration state and the nature of the living-apart experience. By focusing on these Jamaican transnational marriages, this study hopes to cast another light on Jamaican migration, as well as to encourage further discussion and research of legal marriage in Jamaica and in the Afro-Caribbean.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Gratitude is here expressed first to God, who planted the idea and saw it through. To my teacher parents, whose excitement was tangible when their students achieved: your surname is imprinted here with mine. To Denzil and Val, my musician brothers, who have inspired me with the excellence of their craft: I found Pam Hall’s song, which I quote, because Val plays the bass line. To my four beautiful children, Nina, Tamara, Diallo, and Zawadi, who keep me going: may your kinship networks be always as strong as mine. You were sometimes “left behind,” but not for long. To my ‘Big Three’ grandsons, Kimani, Omari, and Mikazae, and the younger grandchildren who follow them: you will also cross stages to receive degrees. Thanks, Omari, for reminding me that I always complete what I begin. To Cousin Noland, who paid for some of my early courses, and to his wife Chevy, who let him. Sternberg’s How To Complete And Survive A Doctoral Dissertation is now returned, with thanks. To my “sisters” and all-time cheerleaders, Diane, Sheila, Carlene, Mayling, Gisel. To goddaughter Shakina, who found books for me when I had no access to a college library. To my eternally patient Supervisory Committee (Cynthia Fuchs-Epstein, Chair, Bill Kornblum, and Joan Mencher, CUNY; and Connie Sutton, NYU), who probably thought I would never finish, but were kind enough not to say so. To Rati, beloved Academic Program Coordinator – there are not enough words to describe my gratitude. To Sonji, who beat me to the finish and proceeded to ‘show and tell’ how she did it. To my interviewees, especially those who have passed on, for their trust: I apologize for taking so long. To my wonderful readers, Allia, Errol, Mai, Marshaleen and Millicent. To Barry Chevannes, who was my friend long before he published the works I cite, but who passed on before he too could be a reader. Last but by no means least, to my husband Charlie, a latecomer to the scene, my everyday companion. You won’t be left behind.
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CHAPTER I

FIRST MEN, NOW WOMEN: THE STUDY

He did not like it in the U.S and was intolerable and miserable when he came”
– An immigrant Wife describes her Left-Behind Husband

“Me no like America, you hear. The place too impersonal”
– A left-Behind Husband describes the United States

“She like America – me no bother pay it no mind”
– Another left-Behind Husband describes his Wife

Introduction

This study explores the migration phenomenon in which Jamaican legally-married\(^1\) couples live transnationally–wives in the United States, husbands in Jamaica–sometimes for as long as twenty or thirty years without either party seeking a divorce. Either the wife emigrates alone because her husband is unable, or unwilling, to obtain an immigrant visa to accompany her or to join her later; or both spouses emigrate together but the husband soon returns home to Jamaica. The quotations that preface this chapter show the divergence of opinions some Jamaican wives and husbands hold regarding life in the United States: one wife respondent reported that her husband did not even procure a passport, he “didn’t even try.”

Jamaican couples report that they jointly decide for the wife to emigrate for the economic improvement of the family. This is not unusual, since Afro-Caribbean\(^2\) women are socialized, and culturally expected, to contribute to the maintenance of their families (Senior 1991; D’Amico 1993; Momsen 1993; Safa 1995; Smith 1996). Goode (1963, 193) theorized this

---

1 Sanctioned by the church and state. Marriage ceremonies are usually performed by an ordained religious minister who is authorized by the state to be a marriage officer as well.

2 Caribbean people of African descent; not synonymous with the broader term, “West Indian,” which refers to the entire English-speaking Caribbean, or Caribbean islands colonized by Britain and includes, in the case of Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana, a sizeable Indo-Caribbean population.
practic as an important element of Caribbean family patterns, a cultural throwback from Africa where

women worked; in most agricultural tribes the wife produced most or all of the food necessary for her own family. Women thus underwent a socialization experience that imposed upon them the notion that as adults they would earn their own keep.

Foner (1986, 136) states that “there is no social barrier in Jamaica to women working beyond the household, and this goes back to the days of slavery when women toiled on the plantations.” Horst (2006, 128) claims that Caribbean slave women worked not only on plantations but also on small plots of land to “cultivate food for personal consumption or sale in the market.”

Caribbean people, perhaps especially Jamaicans, are known to readily embrace emigration as a solution to their economic problems (Anderson 1985; Deere et al 1990; Palmer 1990; Kasinitz 1992; Thomas-Hope 1992; Basch et al. 1994; Fouron and Glick Schiller 1997; Kasinitz et al. 2008): they are “always on the move” (Allahar 2006). Remittances from Caribbean emigrants to relatives in their home countries have become a permanent part of island budgets (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Chamberlain 1997; Olwig 2007; Sampson and Branch-Vital, 2012). These remittances also serve to “increase . . . [immigrants’] status ‘back home’ and to blunt the sharpness of life in the United States” (Le Espiritu 2003, 213).

“Shortly after the emancipation of slaves in 1834” (Vickerman 2001b, 220), Jamaican men were already moving around the Caribbean and Central America in search of work (Reid 1939). At the turn of the twentieth century, they were an integral part of the West Indian crews

---

3 Small (2006) claims that, “among the English-speaking Caribbean countries, Jamaica has had the largest outflow of its citizens than any other island since migration began in earnest in the early 1950s.” Jamaicans are the largest West Indian immigrant group in Canada and the United States, where they are the third largest Caribbean group, after Cuba and the Dominican Republic (northamericanimmigration.org). Figures are inexact because illegal immigrants are not included, but in 2008 “some 637,000 Jamaican foreign born lived in the United States . . . with approximately 123,500 in Canada and 150,000 in the United Kingdom . . . according to official statistical bureaus in each country” (migrationpolicy.org).
who helped build the Panama Canal and the railway system in Costa Rica. Jamaicans formed the majority of the “138,615 West Indians” who immigrated to the United States from 1899 to 1928 (Vickerman 2001b, 202).\(^4\) This U.S. migration wave was halted by the Great Depression (1929-early 1940s) but large-scale Caribbean emigration resumed after the Second World War when, through its 1948 Immigration Act, “Britain began actively recruiting workers from its former colonies . . . . for the post-war reconstruction and to accommodate a booming economy” (Gmelch 2006; Foner 1978; Thompson 1990; Byron 1998). Famed Jamaican folklore poet Louise Bennett (1966) captured the excitement of the time in her dialect poem, “Colonization in Reverse” (standard English on the right):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wat a joyful news, Miss Mattie,</th>
<th>What joyful news, Miss Mattie,</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel like me heart gwine burs</td>
<td>I feel like my heart will burst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica people colonizing</td>
<td>Jamaicans are colonizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Englan in reverse.</td>
<td>England in reverse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By de hundred, by de tousan</td>
<td>By the hundreds and the thousands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From country and from town,</td>
<td>From country and from town,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By de ship-load, by de plane load</td>
<td>By the shipload, by the planeload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica is Englan boun.</td>
<td>Jamaica is England-bound.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Wat a devilment a Englan!
Dem face war an brave de worse,
But me wonderin how dem gwine stan
Colonizin in reverse.

What a problem in England!
They have faced war and braved the worst,
But I’m wondering how they will bear
Colonizing in reverse.

In 1962, the British government claimed that its labor needs had been met and closed this door with its Commonwealth Immigration Act. In 1965, however, a new wave of Caribbean emigration to the United States began when the Hart-Celler Immigration Act replaced the

\(^4\) Citing Reid (1939, 235).
“national origins” quota system, in place since the 1920s, with a “preference system” based on family reunification and the importation of skilled labor (Vickerman 2001b).\(^5\)

The early male Caribbean emigrant was “usually an agricultural labourer or unskilled town dweller” (Brown 2006). With improvements in the accessibility of international travel and the growth of the service economies in the two main receiving countries, the United States and Canada, Caribbean emigration changed from predominantly male to predominantly female, concentrated in the United States in cities like New York, Miami, Los Angeles, and Atlanta (Brettell and Simon 1986; Bonnett 1990; Kasinitz 1992, Foner 1999; George 2005). Caribbean immigrant women work: in private homes, as domestic helpers and caregivers of children and the elderly; in hospitals, as nurses and nursing aides; and in the housekeeping department of hotels. As inner-city schools count more Caribbean and Caribbean-descent children among their populations, Caribbean teachers have also been recruited to work in areas like Brooklyn, New York (Colen 1990, 1995; Chang 2000). Jamaican men still travel to the United States under the Ministry of Labour and National Security’s Overseas Employment Programme, but on seasonal, short-term (under one year) contracts. The farm and factory components of this government program remain male, but the hotel component is now largely female (Thomas 2003).

Jamaican husbands who do not emigrate with their wives (left-behind husbands) may have heard discouraging stories from other male immigrants and are unwilling to make the sacrifices that life in the United States may entail, especially to be subjected to second-class status and racial discrimination (Woldemikael 1989; Hickling 1991; Kasinitz 1992; Plaza 1998;

\(^5\) Bryan (2014) lists, in his Appendix II, migration figures to the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom from 1956 to 2000. In 1956, the figures were: 3,378; 134; and 17,302, respectively. Migration to the United Kingdom began falling in 1965 and this trend has continued. 1965 migration figures were: 9,161; 104; and 9,160, respectively. In 1967, migration to Canada rose from 104 in 1965 to 3,459, and has continued to be in the thousands. In 2,000, migration figures were: 16,000 to the United States; 2,451 to Canada; and 363 to the United Kingdom.
Those who emigrate but return home offer varied reasons for their decision. Some are unable to find work in the United States, or work with the same degree of prestige as in Jamaica: service jobs like doorman, security guard, fast-food restaurant worker, or taxi-driver, they consider to be of low status, not enticing enough to encourage emigration. Other Jamaican men simply miss their social and cultural life “back home.” Bonnett (1990, 145) noted the “endless role strain,” “neuroses and psychiatric disorders” of some husbands who try to join their wives in the United States, adding that

a small number of second generation West Indian psychiatrists, psychiatric social workers, and clinical psychologists have begun to serve this group. However, they still experience great difficulty because of the immigrants’ reluctance to seek help from psychiatrists or psychologists, who are often perceived in the “old country” as only treating, or dealing with, the truly “insane.” . . . Caught in a Catch-22 situation, they leave their homes and establish outside sexual relationships with younger women, often to prove their sexual virility.

In her study of Filipino American families, Le Espiritu (2003, 150) found that “in many instances, men who immigrate as their wives’ dependents experience downward occupational mobility in the United States, while their wives maintain their professional status.” In the case of Jamaica, nurses and teachers who are recruited and emigrate legally are able to “maintain their professional status” but more often the women who emigrate on their own, legally or illegally, accept service jobs far below their professional status as stepping-stones to the achievement of personal and professional goals (Bonnett 1990; Marshall 1994; Colen 1995; Bobb-Smith 2003; Bauer and Thompson 2006). Before U.S. immigration laws became more restrictive, it was easy

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6 Bobb-Smith (2003, 41-42) was a junior librarian in Trinidad and Tobago, but migrated to Canada on the Domestic Scheme and was placed with a “White upper-class family.” Colen (1990, 94) describes her New York respondents as “teachers, policewomen, and clerical and service workers in the public and private sectors. . . . Prior to migration, few had done paid household work, while some employed household workers themselves.” They “described employer behavior which left them feeling held in low esteem, taken for granted, and denied their adult humanity” (Colen 1990, 101).
for women to perform these jobs illegally because employers were not concerned with the immigration status of their workers. Changes in immigration policy produce changes in the opportunity structure (Cloward and Ohlin 1960; Merton and Sztompka 1996). It is now difficult, but still not impossible, to obtain these jobs since openings are circulated among Caribbean immigrants through what Kasinitz (1992, 105) terms “word-of-mouth advertisement.” Career advancement of these women is no doubt facilitated because many of them have achieved a reasonable standard of education before they emigrate. The under-performance of boys in relation to girls has been, and continues to be, a concern for the Jamaican educational authorities (Miller 1986; USAID 2005). USAID reports that in 2002 male/female enrollment was similar from early childhood through secondary school but different at the post-secondary level, as shown in the following table.

### TABLE 1. Jamaica: Gender Achievement Differences

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Post-Secondary</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-formal training programs</td>
<td>13,853</td>
<td>19,196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary institutions</td>
<td>13,568</td>
<td>25,564</td>
</tr>
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*Source: “JA People; Newsletter, Social and Manpower Division, PIOJ; Vol. 9 No 1, 21,” USAID 2005, Table 3, page 12.*

Male/female school attendance was also similar, so the debate continues as to why “gender achievement differences are evident from the earliest years of school life in Jamaica” (USAID 2005, 13, my emphasis).

Until they are also able to emigrate, children in these transnational families are often initially left behind in Jamaica (Green 1997; Foner 1999; Pottinger 2005), sometimes with

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7 The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), November 6, 1986, established sanctions against employers ranging from warnings to fines of $250 to $10,000 for each undocumented worker hired (Colen 1990, 92).

8 Gordon (1990) claims that Caribbean people migrate less frequently as family units than most other immigrant groups.
fathers, but more often with any number of surrogate ‘mothers’ of the renowned Caribbean ‘kinship’ network—grandparents, older siblings, other family members, friends, even domestic helpers (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Sutton 1992; Sutton and Chaney 1994; Foner 2001a; Bobb-Smith 2003; Chamberlain 2006; Basi 2007). Goode (1963, 186) notes that this leaving children with relatives “for lengthy periods, often until they are adults, for a variety of reasons,” is the residue of another African family pattern, like the importance of women’s work.

Couples foresee their living-apart marital arrangement as short-lived, but transience gives way to permanence and sojourner wives become settlers (Pessar 1990). Older wives settle in the United States to help adult children care for American-born grandchildren, or they become dependent on the benefits (senior citizen centers, discounts, and other privileges) that are provided for the aging in the United States, but not in Jamaica. One senior citizen respondent in this study declared that she prayed that she would not even “buck [stub] her toe” while visiting Jamaica because of the inaccessibility and/or unaffordability of good healthcare. Younger wives settle because they find ever more goals to achieve. Tertiary education is more readily available in the United States than in Jamaica (Foner 2005, 141). A whole lifetime may therefore pass with the married couple living apart transnationally and neither spouse filing for divorce.

I have been interested in this topic since, as a child growing up in a country district in Jamaica, I noticed that older women, mainly housewives without paying jobs and retirees, would

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9 Chamberlain’s (1997, 74) Barbadian respondents thought they would spend “three to five years.” Plaza’s (1998) respondents in Canada meant to spend “five years tops;” Gmelch (2006) reports that his Barbadian respondents “all saw their stay overseas as being temporary. Most expected to be home within five years.” However, sometimes “five years would pass without couples seeing one another.” He was led to wonder “how well the marriages of [his] middle-class American friends would have endured under such circumstances.” Foner (1986, 144) was told by a respondent that “when she got her green card and her daughter graduated, she intended to ‘commute’ between New York and Jamaica, coming to the United States to do household work when she needed the extra money.”

10 Someone who returns home after spending some years abroad.

11 Gmelch and Gmelch (1997, 112) note the importance of Barbadian grandmothers in the raising of grandchildren. Small (2006, 226) mentions children and grandchildren as one reason some immigrant women never return to Jamaica to reside.
sometimes leave their husbands to “go away” to take care of grandchildren. I was told that this was because daycare abroad was very expensive. These wives would return to Jamaica once or twice a year, some for longer visits than others, but seldom would their husbands travel to the United States. Rather, they seemed to wait for their wives to visit or, better yet, come home. When I grew up, a teacher colleague in Trinidad and Tobago followed this same pattern on retiring. I found this marital arrangement surprising, especially because my own parents in Jamaica were married for 50 years until my father’s death, and they rarely slept away from each other. When my first child was born in Trinidad, my mother came to help me for six weeks and could not be persuaded to extend her stay another day.

The experience of Jamaican legally-married couples whose marriages become transnational through migration has not received research attention probably because: (a) it is personal and thus out of the public gaze; and (b) legal marriage is not the dominant form of coupling in Jamaica and the Afro-Caribbean. This study is aimed at this knowledge gap.

**Research Question and Hypotheses**

The main question explored here is: What keeps these marriages intact when couples live apart in two different societies and cultures for so many years?

I hypothesized that Jamaicans do not initially consider this marital arrangement a problem. First, everyday companionship is not an essential element of Jamaican conjugal relationships because boys and girls in Jamaica are not socialized to be friends. Foner (1986, 137) describe the Jamaican men and women she interviewed in New York and London as having “different patterns of social life.” Second, emigration is a valuable asset–there is hardly a Jamaican family today without kinfolk abroad. Rawlins (2006, 9) speaks of “the dispersal of

---

12 Jamaican childhood socialization is discussed in Chapter II.
Jamaican family members all over the world.” Furthermore, as Deere et al. (1990, 72) found, “throughout the English-speaking Caribbean, women express the need to be economically “‘independent’ as central to their lives.” The West Indian women in Colen’s study (1995, 80) viewed migration to New York as a means of constituting their families. While all were employed in the Caribbean in working- or middle-class jobs (as locally defined), economic conditions severely limited their financial capabilities, standards of living, and educational and employment opportunities. Mothers migrated to support themselves, their families, and others in the short run and to secure better opportunities (through obtaining legal residence in the U.S.) for themselves and their kin in the long run.

Moreover, I suspected that Jamaican spouses, like the Barbadians mentioned by Chamberlain (1997) and Gmelch (2006), did not accurately anticipate the length of time apart that would ensue from the migration experience. Movement through time and the life course, coupled with the effects of acculturation, might present problems, even though immigrant wives were already exposed to U.S. culture in Jamaica before migration. Spouses’ expectations of marriage might also change, and in an increasingly gendered way. Ferree (1979) found that Cuban women’s employment in the United States did not liberate them from their home country values, but I expected Jamaican immigrant women to discard those cultural values that they no longer considered helpful. Outcomes of these transnational marriages would vary in perhaps unforeseen, though not unforeseeable, ways.

Furthermore I theorized that, for some Jamaican wives, emigration would be an indirect response to the inequities of their marriages, specifically the unequal division of household labor (wives’ “second shift”15 and the double standard morality applicable to men and women.

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13 Green (1997, 174) discusses “cultural diffusion and the homogenization or the internationalization of culture.” See also Pedraza’s (1991) discussion of the “social consequences of gender.”

14 Former Prime Minister Michael Manley (1974, 195) expressed concern that “Jamaican women do not have full equality before the law in a number of respects and particularly in marriage.”

15 Hochschild (2012 [1989]).
Perhaps many Jamaican wives, although thrilled, honored, even grateful, for the social status marriage confers, are less than happy with their married lives. Foner’s New York nurse (1986) told her, “In Jamaica, oh please. That was slavery. Bring the man his dinner and his slippers, do the laundry, you’re kidding. Not anymore.” In Jamaica wives could respond to the unequal division of labor by employing household help, but society expected them to react to their husbands’ infidelity in silence. Emigration would provide them an escape, without losing their married-woman status and without the pain and stigma of divorce. Indeed, Foner (1986, 139) found that “some Jamaican women migrants never sent for their husbands at all, and a number of women [she] interviewed had actually moved to New York to bring about or formalize a separation.”

I expected some of these transnational marriages to flounder over time and that, if they eventually ended, they might affect not only the immediate family but other families in both Jamaican and U.S. societies, for example:

(a) adult children of the couple who may have become disillusioned and mistrustful of marriage because of their parents’ relationship;

(b) the ‘other woman’ who, unknown to the legal wife, may take care of the husband in Jamaica for years, even bear children for him, although she is fully aware that he is married and thus may never marry her;

(c) the children of this ‘other’ relationship; and

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16 Caribbean people are known to suffer adversity in silence, and laugh a lot, often “not from joy” (Glick Schiller and Fouron, 2001, 1).

17 Douglass (1992, 196) states that in 1985, some of the 84 percent of divorces based on “separation or desertion” may have resulted from “the high number of Jamaicans who move abroad without their spouses.” Vickerman (2001b) mentions that “marriages [in New York] often dissolve as spouses grow apart from each other.” In an email conversation with me, he explained that his comment “is based on [his] experiences living within the Jamaican community in New York City . . . . Many women who migrated without their husbands . . . have had great difficulty maintaining the relationship. The marriages have been filled with tension and have tended to dissolve over time.”
(d) the male ‘friend’ of the wife in the United States who, unknown to her husband, may facilitate her everyday life emotionally, financially, perhaps even sexually, but must keep his distance because he knows that she is married.

On the other hand, I considered that the physical and temporal space afforded by migration might revitalize some marriages rather than break them apart, since Jamaican society still regards legal marriage as “the measure against which other romantic and sexual relationships are compared” and divorce is considered a personal failure to be avoided at all costs. Because “the flexibility of Jamaican kin relationships [are] . . . empowered by their pragmatism and informality” (Bauer and Thompson 2006, 4), kinship ties would also play a key role in marriage outcomes, since emigrant wives reside among “kin” (kin and fictive kin) in the United States, while husbands continue to be involved with their wives’ family and friends back home.

Theoretical Framework and Review of Literature

The following sociological theories and constructs are all appropriate lenses through which to view marriage and migration: Durkheim’s organic solidarity, in which society is held

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18 Pedraza (1991, 311) notes, concerning “marrying a man who worked elsewhere” that “the marriage relation itself may well have benefitted as women acquired more control over their lives and a measure of dignity while the marriage became more of a partnership.”
20 See, for example, the discussion in the “All Woman” column, “How You’re Killing Your Marriage,” Jamaica Observer of Friday, February 17, 2014.
21 Discussed by Clarke 1957; Lowenthal 1972; Smith 1988; Sutton 1997; Brice 2005; and Bashi 2007.
22 Chamberlain’s term (2006, 4). Basch et al. (1994, 80) state that “the multi-pronged and elastic character of the West Indian family, shaped by centuries of geographic and temporal separation and border straddling, has meant that West Indian kin units lack precise contours.” Rawlins (2006, 34) states that in Jamaica “household members who are not consanguineous or consensually related may even be more closely related emotionally and socially than members of the so-called nuclear family.”
23 Unlike the Chinese, whose “extended kin and friendship networks, and the associated support and control mechanisms, are disrupted” and whose “new ethnic networks tend to be composed of coethnic ‘strangers’ rather than close kin and friends and tend to be more instrumental than emotionally intimate” (Zhou 2009, 26-27).
24 Chamberlain (1997, 53) found that “[j]ust as family support enabled the migrants to leave, so migration assisted in the maintenance of the family at home, ensuring family loyalty and identity across the generations, and across the seas.”
together by the dependency of roles among people and the importance of status within groups; structural functionalism, which focuses on society’s parts being interdependent and functioning as one organism; symbolic interaction, which claims that society is based on the ongoing interaction between people; the family as institution; agency vs. structure; and cultural theories, especially in relation to the interchange concomitant with transnationalism. To respond to the research question this study uses a combination of these theories to discuss: migration and marriage, including living apart together (LAT) marriages; colonialism and slavery; childhood socialization and gender norms, including the Caribbean concepts of “male marginality” and “respectability vs. reputation;” and the individual life course; all with specific reference to Jamaica and the Afro-Caribbean. The ethnographic method employed in the research and Goffman’s (1959) “presentation of the self” are also discussed.

**Design and Methods**

The study is qualitative since interviews and participant observation, described in Chapter III, are employed to enter the “life-world” of these transnational Jamaican couples, to ascertain their “motives, meanings, emotions, and other subjective aspects,” as well as their “daily actions and behavior in ordinary settings and situations, the structure of those actions, and the objective conditions that accompany and influence them” (Schwartz and Jacobs 1979, 5). Life stories produce an “analysis that conceives of the person not simply as an example of a culture or of a social condition but as a person making choices within a social and cultural domain” (Handel 2000, xii). “Interviews are valuable, because they allow us to listen to individuals’ own interpretations, definitions, and perceptions of their experiences” (Le Espiritu 2003, 18). While results may not be generalizable to all Jamaican transnational couples, these couples do provide an exploratory view. Chief respondents were spouses and adult children who had participated in
these transnational marriages for more than a decade, as this timeframe was considered a reasonable turning point for immigrant wives to be considered settlers rather than sojourners and the marital arrangement to be considered more permanent than temporary.

One immediate limitation was that Caribbean people, including Jamaicans, are often reluctant to discuss their “personal business,” especially with strangers (Bobb-Smith 2003, xvii). Moreover, Little-White (2006) voices a relevant known contradiction: although “sex is dominant” in Jamaican culture, “movingly expressed in popular music, dance and social conversations,” Jamaicans are socialized that “to talk about anything sexual is taboo.”

Douglass (1992, 171) speaks of the “roundabout approach” she had to take in her study, since “[i]ntimate sexual relations are not easy to investigate ethnographically and are sensitive areas to explore not just as a researcher but even as a family/friend.” I therefore did not advertise publicly for respondents. Beginning with couples who were personally known to me, I generated a “snowball” sample of interviewees, mainly by word of mouth, in the hope that results would be varied and interesting enough to grant validity to the study. Another possible limitation was that the double standard of morality would impede “truth-telling,” as wives might be particularly careful how they presented themselves to me (Goffman 1959). Since my requirement that couples should have lived apart for at least a decade meant that most couple respondents would be over 40 years old, the vagaries of memory would also merit consideration (Schacter 1996).

Given my small sample of 49 respondents, participant observation in Jamaica became an important source of additional information. This included returning to Jamaica to reside for three years, from 2004 to 2007, to participate in the society and to analyze the content of mass media.

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25 This proves to be social class-specific, as discussed in the following chapter.
products (articles in the press, radio call-in shows, and TV programs); reggae music; theatrical presentations; Caribbean literature; and casual conversations.

**Conclusion: Significance and Structure of the Study**

The study of these Jamaican transnational legal marriages provides an opportunity to focus on aspects of Jamaican immigrant life that are normally not seen and to advance our knowledge of legal marriage in Jamaica and the Afro-Caribbean, a subject that is largely unresearched. Despite the presence of other culturally acceptable forms of coupling to be discussed in Chapter II, the ideal family in Jamaica is still headed by a legally married mother and father (Chevannes 2001; Bell 2006; Stone 2007; Luton 2010). Ideals are important, as Goode (1964, 6) affirms, because they are “a guide to behavior . . . values . . . . sets of norms which are passed on from one generation to another as a major constituent of culture.” Culture, in turn, “provides an individual with a framework for making sense of and interpreting his or her own life and its larger contexts” (Geertz 1973).

Chapter II situates the topic within the relevant literature; Chapter III presents a brief description of the research project and its respondents. In Chapter IV, respondents discuss their migration experiences and marriages and their responses are analyzed in Chapter V. Chapter VI concludes with a summary of the study’s findings and suggestions for future research.

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26 Kaufman’s paraphrase (1986, 15).
CHAPTER II

MIGRATION AND MARRIAGE: THE LITERATURE

Gender relations shape immigration patterns, and in turn, migration experiences reshape gender relations.

–Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994

One of the challenges of marriage is to learn how to live with a person and integrate that person into your life. By living apart, you are losing the opportunity to gain that level of intimacy and cooperation . . . although alone time is an important element.

–Haltzman 2006

Foreword

The literature reviewed in this chapter reflects the attempt to uncover the social and cultural forces that help maintain the legal marriages of Jamaican couples–immigrant wives in the United States and left-behind husbands in Jamaica–who live apart for decades. How do these couples stay together, and do they consider their transnational marital arrangement worth their while? What are the challenges they face? Are both spouses likely to experience the transnational marriage in the same way or are there gendered differences? How are marriage outcomes affected by: (a) the migration experience; and (b) the nature of the marriage itself?

This literature review serves to: further define and situate the research question, the actual research methods to be discussed in Chapter III; contextualize the life stories told by respondents in Chapter IV; indicate possible themes for analysis in Chapter V; and suggest areas for future research in the concluding Chapter VI.

Migration

Jamaicans and other Caribbean nationals are just one group of many “trans-nationals” in the modern world, immigrants who “build social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders . . . [and] develop and maintain multiple relationships–familial, economic,
social, organizational, religious, and political—that span borders” (Basch et al. 1994, 7; Foner 1998). Sutton (1992, 244) noted the “‘bidirectional’ rather than unidirectional flow of goods, people, political ideologies, money, and cultural practices” that has characterized Caribbean migrations. Ease of travel, the short distance between Jamaica and the United States (unlike Britain) and the increasing availability of technology, all greatly facilitate communication and contact. Marriage, however, may require more than phone calls (even video calls with Skype or Face Time), visits, and the transfer of financial resources through companies like Western Union or Moneygram, in order to remain intact.

Marital struggles of other transnational populations are well documented. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1992, 1994) describes how Mexican wives scheme together secretly to rejoin emigrant husbands who are unwilling to receive them in the United States and the power struggles that ensue. Min (1998; 2001, 301) discusses the “marital conflicts and tensions” that stem from “the discrepancy between Korean immigrant women’s increased economic role and [the] persistence of their husbands’ traditional patriarchal ideology.” These conflicts are exacerbated by the fact that many Korean couples have to interact constantly because the language barrier forces them to spend all day together in family businesses. Filipino husbands, although admirably raising children, are stigmatized by their peers for ‘allowing’ their wives to go abroad to work (Parreñas 2005). In 1993 Kibria (1993, 108, 109) reported how Vietnamese immigrant wives, in adjusting to U.S. cultural norms, walked an “ideological tightrope—struggling to take advantage of their new resources but also to protect the structure and sanctity of the traditional family system.” Their husbands complained bitterly about their loss of family status: “In Vietnam the man of the house is king. Below him the children, then pets of the house, and then the women. . . . [In the United States] the woman is the king and the man holds a position below the pets.” In 2011,
Hoang and Yeoh described how husbands left behind in Vietnam are considered emasculated because, like the Filipino left-behind husbands, they assume childcare duties “traditionally ascribed” to women. Bao’s (2005, 32) study of “gender, sexuality and identity among the Chinese Thai diaspora” describes yet another migration-marriage challenge: “transnational polygyny,” as migrant men enjoy “a family on both ends” in China and Thailand, while their left-behind wives in China are considered “widows of living ones” (Bao 2005, 31).

Initially, Caribbean migration studies (Glazer and Moynihan 1970; Waters 1990; Kasinitz 1992; Portes and Rumbaut 1996), with the exception of Foner (1978), did not factor gender into their analyses. As with other established immigrant populations in the United States, Caribbean migration research focused mainly on issues of integration and ethnic identity (Waters 1990; Min and Kim 1999; Takenaka 1999). More recently, Caribbean migration scholars routinely study Caribbean immigrant women, their assimilation to the host culture, and the menial jobs they have to do to survive (Ferree 1979; Prieto 1986; Bonnett 1990; Gordon 1990; Colen 1990, 1995; Marshall 1994; Sutton and Chaney 1994; Byron 1998; Pessar 1999; and Watkins-Owens 2001). However, marriages of these immigrant women have been mentioned in passing rather than researched (Foner 1986, 1999; Bauer and Thompson, Chamberlain, and Vickerman, all 2006). One of Colen’s (1990, 102) respondents, for example, described the difficulty “to come . . . to New York City and have to be living with people . . . [who treat her] like a child or some little girl” when she is a “woman, a mother, responsible for a home, with a husband.” Chamberlain (2006, 66) relates how a respondent’s husband “refused to join her [in England]. He claimed not to like the cold, but . . . [she heard] ‘he have another woman in the house’” and eventually, after 16 years, divorced him. Kasinitz et al. (2008, 31, 106, my emphasis) noted the absence of fathers in the families they studied in New York City, some of whom were no doubt Jamaican:
The number of married couples is low: a quarter of the West Indian population are divorced, separated, or widowed; another 16 percent never married. More than half of . . . respondents grew up without both biological parents in the home. . . . Some West Indian fathers never migrated . . . whereas others returned to their home countries fairly early in our respondents’ childhoods. . . . These situations seemed most common among West Indians.¹

However, unlike the Philippines and Vietnam (Hoang and Yeoh 2011) where left-behind husbands have been studied, it is in fiction rather than research that a Caribbean left-behind husband is portrayed, as Joseph in Jamaican author Lorna Goodison’s short story, “Bella Makes Life” (1990).

The effects of migration on the children of these Jamaican marriages have also been studied, both in the United States and in the Caribbean. In the United States, research has focused on first-, 1.5-,² and second-generation Caribbean children and their educational experiences, how they succeed academically by renegotiating their identities in the United States because they retain their Caribbean cultural norms (Woldemikael 1989; Waters 1990, 1997, 1999, 2001; Kasinitz et al. 2001, 2004, 2008; Rumbaut and Portes 2001; Vickerman 2001b; Waters and Sykes, 2009). In the Caribbean, attention has been drawn to the left-behind or “barrel” children of emigrant mothers, so named because of the barrels of food, clothing and other consumer goods shipped to them regularly from abroad (Crawford-Brown 1994; Chamberlain 1997, Vickerman, 2001b). Scholars have noted these children’s lack of interest in education as they wait to be ‘sent for’; their vulnerability to incest and other forms of family abuse; and their proclivities for deviance (Crawford-Brown 1994; Pottinger 2005). In the Sunday

¹ Fatherless households are also present in Jamaica and the Afro-Caribbean and are by any means solely the product of emigration. In 2006, the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) Opposition Member of Parliament Andrew Holness, describing the “ailing institution of the family” in Jamaica, told Parliament that: 80 percent of births were to single mothers; 75 percent of children lived with one or no parent; and 70 percent of children had their father absent from their lives (Boyne 2006).
² Children, born in the Caribbean, who migrated at a young age.
Gleaner\(^3\) of June 3, 2007, the educator Esther Tyson, urging the government to require father’s names on birth certificates because more than half of the children “born out of wedlock” have “no named fathers,” complained of the negative effects of emigration on left-behind children:

Parents leave their children with grandmothers who are so ill they cannot even look after themselves; with siblings who themselves need supervision; with aunties who use these children as slaves. In the meantime, they go off to the United States or greener pastures to send home barrels to make up for their lost presence.

In Jamaica the migration decision usually arises from two main structural events: economic hardship (poverty, unemployment) in the home country—the ‘push’; and the promise of a better life in the host country—the ‘pull’. Thomas-Hope (1992) offers reasons why people leave and long for their beautiful warm islands to seek their fortunes in the cold metropolises of England, the United States and Canada as: “economic, framed in a discourse of supply and demand and the desire for individual and family betterment; functional, in terms of rational decisions based on push-pull factors and cost-benefit analysis; and societal, integrating social, psychological and economic perspectives.” Diaz-Briquets (1985, 42-43) provides a more detailed list:

1. high population and labor force growth;
2. insufficient employment opportunities;
3. expectations and aspirations influenced by the more developed countries;
4. social and political strife;
5. advances in transportation and communication that have reduced the economic and psychic costs of emigration;
6. the establishment of “ethnic colonies” in the United States that eases the assimilation of newly arrived immigrants;

\(^3\) The chief Jamaican daily newspaper, established in 1834.
(7) vast differences in wage levels and standard of living between the United States and Caribbean countries;

(8) the need for cheap, abundant, unskilled labor in the U.S. agriculture, industry and services; and

(9) U.S. immigration policy that encourages family reunification.

These reasons all help to explain why Jamaican wives emigrate to the United States to “work some dollars to help . . . make life” for when they return home, to quote Bella in Goodison’s story, while many husbands like Joseph continue to live in Jamaica. This study adds a possible tenth reason to Diaz-Briquet’s list–wives’ escape from unsatisfying marriages, without the pain or stigma of divorce.

In earlier migration, when husbands left wives behind, it was usually because of lucrative but fixed-term contracts. Most of these men, like the “Colon Man” in the popular Jamaican children’s folksong\(^4\) and my maternal grandfather, returned to Jamaica at the end of their contracts and built an improved life with their earnings. However, some husbands did manage to stay in the host country and some wives did not join their husbands. For example, a college friend of mine did not know her father because he left Jamaica for England when she was very young and never returned. Initially his letters would urge his wife to join him, but she refused to leave Jamaica, where she continued to live and raise their children until she died at a ripe old age. It is said that he remarried in England, without ever asking his wife in Jamaica for a divorce. Now wives emigrate and stay in the host country while some husbands refuse to join them. One husband respondent in this study also seems to have remarried without divorcing his former wife but he is in Jamaica while she is in England–the tables are now turned.

\(^4\) The song, “One Two Three Four, Colon Man A Come,” pokes fun at the returned migrant from Colon, Panama, with his ostentatious dress and flashy watch on his wrist, but who still has to look at the sun to tell the time because he has returned as uneducated as when he emigrated.
TABLE 2. Current U.S. Visa Application Details for Jamaica

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Visa</th>
<th>Filing Fees</th>
<th>Petitioner: Waiting Period</th>
<th>How and Where to Apply</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visitor Visa</td>
<td>US$160</td>
<td>Self: 42 calendar days for appointment, 1 day for interview, 5 days for delivery of passport with visa affixed</td>
<td>U.S. Embassy, Kingston, Jamaica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiancé(e) Visa</td>
<td>US$240</td>
<td>U.S. Citizen/Sponsor: varies from case to case</td>
<td>USCIS Office, United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant Visa or Green Card</td>
<td>US$420</td>
<td>U.S. Citizen/Sponsor: varies from case to case</td>
<td>USCIS Office, United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Visa</td>
<td>US$160</td>
<td>Self: 6 calendar days for appointment, 1 day for processing</td>
<td>Kingston, Jamaica</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Data adapted from www.us-immigration.com; travel.state.gov; and Kingston.usembassy.gov.

One contributor to the Jamaican transnational marriages studied here is U.S. immigration legislation which, although supportive on paper of family reunification, makes it quite difficult for Jamaicans to obtain an immigrant, sometimes even a visitor visa (Table 2). Another contributing factor is that the United States is a credential society (Collins 1979) and professionals certified in their home countries have to be recertified in the United States when they emigrate. Moreover, some Jamaican husbands may have worked their way up the ranks in

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5 Regularly updated and subject to change depending on country of applicant.
6 Processing fees may be added, depending on the visa type.
7 Varies during the year.
8 Must be prepared to show evidence of employment, family ties, purpose of trip, financial support, and intent to return to Jamaica.
9 Must file an Affidavit of Support showing an income of at least 125 percent of the poverty level per USCIS table and attach a job letter, recent pay stub, copy of latest W2 form from U.S. employer to show previous year’s income, and a “tax transcript” showing evidence of taxes paid.
10 Must marry U.S. citizen fiancé(e) within 90 days of entry into the United States.
12 Must show acceptance by an approved school.
the banking sector, for example, without certification only to find that they cannot obtain an equivalent position in the United States without a college degree. Race is yet another contributing factor, as racism and racial discrimination continue to exist in American society, even if less explicitly than in the past (Mortimer and Bryce-Laporte 1981; Kasinitz 1992; Vickerman 1999, 2001a and b). It may be that Jamaican men have a sense of masculinity that does not brook challenges to their racial identity and that this pride is compounded by their sense of male superiority, or it may simply be that Black Jamaican women are more welcome in American society than Black Jamaican men.

Family-unfriendly migration laws and host country hostility may therefore keep spouses apart. While some Jamaican husbands may be expressing their agency in choosing to stay behind, others may be truly left behind because of structural constraints faced by all immigrants. Wives who have overstayed their welcome in the United States, for example, will not return home to visit their husbands because such a visit will forbid their re-entry to the United States, perhaps forever. They have to remain in the United States for their immigration status to be regularized, either through sponsorship by an employer (Colen 1990, 97 and 107) or through amnesty, both of which can take a very long time. One husband in this study expressed frustration during our first interview because his wife was in illegal status so he had to do all the visiting. On a subsequent interview he was much happier, as his wife had received her Green Card and had just returned to the United States after visiting him in Jamaica.

Marriage

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13 Colen (1990, 91) cited the speculation that “the ratio of illegal to legal Caribbeans in New York [was] as great as 1:1.”
14 “Minimally a two-year process” but “two to five or more years often pass between their arrival . . . and the acquisition of green cards. . . . The years of household work leading to the last stage of the sponsorship process do not always guarantee obtaining a green card.”
Jamaicans in Jamaica, like other people in the world, are exposed through globalization to American television programs, movies, and press articles and thus to American/Western marriage norms and their emphasis on romantic love. In 2007, for example, Jamaican veteran journalist and pastor (and a regular contributor in the Gleaner and on TVJ) Ian Boyne, in an article, “How Should We Live?”¹⁵ found quite desirable for Jamaican society the “economic, social and psychological benefits of [American] marriage,” described in a May 25 Economist article, “The Frayed Knot.” Jamaicans in Jamaica are also just as enchanted by weddings as Americans: until the cost became prohibitive the leading television channel, Television Jamaica (TVJ), sponsored an annual “Dream Wedding,” in which one lucky couple was selected to have a wedding planner organize, free of charge, a highly publicized fairytale gala wedding and reception. In 2011, the Victoria Mutual Building Society, a leading financial organization in Jamaica, celebrated the 25th anniversary of its free annual public forum, “Marriage & the Family,” offering “wedding planning tips, marital advice, parenting and other real-life issues.” Their Gleaner advertisement of June 24, 2007 declared, “In a time when some weddings last longer than marriages, we have a lasting commitment to family . . . [and are] committed to doing this forever if necessary. . . . [since] a wedding is not a marriage and a house is not a home without commitment.”

However, no body of research on legal marriage exists in the Afro-Caribbean to match the wealth of studies available in the United States where marriage, although losing ground, remains the main, society-endorsed form of coupling. With the legalization of same-sex unions among the leading controversies, more research is forthcoming.¹⁶ In many of the American studies sample sizes are large (Waite and Gallagher consulted hundreds of cross-disciplinary

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¹⁵ “In Focus” column, Sunday Gleaner, June 3.
¹⁶ Dobson 2004.
studies), comparisons abound, and the personal interview puts a human face to the analysis. American marriage is studied “both as a personal relationship and as an institution” (Blankenhorn, 2007).

As a personal relationship, topics include: the reluctance to commit to marriage and difficulties in staying married (Blumstein and Schwartz 1983; Wilson 2002); and advice on how to get married (Fein and Schneider 2001 and 2007) and how to make marriage better (Wallerstein and Blakeslee 1995; Haltzman with Digeronimo 2006). Cherlin (2009) claims that the postponing of marriage is as related to economics as it is to a fear of divorce; Zimmermann (2012) gives a modern couple’s reasons for getting married as “a far less romantic mix of love, legal protections, and health insurance. . . . [indicating] a “return to the time when marriage was largely a business relationship, rather than a romantic endeavor.” He cites U.S. Census Bureau figures: the median age for first marriages is now 26.5 for women and 28.7 for men, “the oldest in U.S. history.”

As a social institution, studies ask whether marriage is: outdated and/or meaningless and, if so, what should replace it (Bernard 1982; Anderson et al 2002; Blankenhorn 2007); more beneficial to men (Nock 1998) than to women (Scarf 1987); or equally beneficial to both men and women (Waite and Gallagher 2000; PBS FRONTLINE 2002). The dissolution of marriage in separation or divorce, though not as vilified as before, is still seen by some Americans as ‘failure,’ producing a barrage of social ills (Furstenberg and Cherlin 1991; Wallerstein et al. 2000), especially because of the absence of fathers from families (Blankenhorn 1995; Daniels 1998; Wilson 2002). However, as Goode (1963, 19) points out, the “ideology of the [Western] conjugal family . . . [still] asserts that if one’s family life is unpleasant, one has the right to change it.” Jamaican immigrant wives have already seen stylized versions of American
marriages on Jamaican television before they emigrate and have already been influenced in varying degrees by American marriage mores. On migrating to the United States these wives, especially those who work as live-in domestics in American homes,\(^\text{17}\) are exposed to the reality of American marriage mores and values.

With few exceptions, including Clarke, published over 50 years ago, Chevannes (1992, 2001), Douglass (1992), Brown and Chevannes (1998), and Stone (2007), Jamaican and Afro-Caribbean discussion of legal marriage takes place not in research studies, but mainly in everyday conversation, mass media, popular music, fiction, and the theater. Content analysis of these forms of expression therefore forms an integral part of this research study. Some of the challenges facing Jamaican and Afro-Caribbean marriage are identical to those discussed in other parts of the world. **Personal** concerns include the unequal, gendered division of household labor mentioned earlier, and adultery.\(^\text{18}\) **Social** concerns include the usual barrage of ‘dysfunctions’ attributed to separation, divorce, and the ‘breakdown’ of the family: the poverty of children being raised in single-parent, mostly female-headed households; violence against women and child abuse; and boys turning to delinquency and crime, the most serious social problem in Jamaica, because of the absence in the home of a father figure and role model. In his presentation to Parliament in May 2006, Opposition Member Andrew Holness stated:\(^\text{19}\)

> Local and international studies [affirm that] . . . . children in homes in which the father is absent tend to manifest anti-social behaviour, delinquency, depression, early sexual initiation, drug abuse, low academic performance, higher drop-out rates, which all culminate in later years into low career attainment and low productivity in general. . . . When the family fails, the value system fails and it becomes difficult to achieve social cohesion and order.

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\(^{17}\) See Foner 1986.
\(^{18}\) A more commonly used term in Jamaica than “infidelity” or “cheating.”
\(^{19}\) Boyne 2006.
Other issues are more distinctly Afro-Caribbean, for example, ‘blended’ families resulting from premarital and extramarital sexual relations rather than from divorce or death; and most recently, the increased incidence of HIV/AIDS cases among heterosexual married women\(^{20}\) and, as Afro-Caribbean society is notably homophobic, the ‘scourge’ of homosexuality and ‘horror’ of same-sex marriage. Underlying the Afro-Caribbean discussion is the sense that “family” in the Jamaican context is much broader than in the United States, because of the varied conjugal relationships and the wider concept of kinship. Other distinctive features of Jamaican marriage are: the conceptualization of infidelity as a male prerogative, because of the double standard of morality endemic to Jamaica; and the lack of feminist ‘sisterhood’ between married and unmarried women.

Lack of academic study of Afro-Caribbean marriage reflects the fact that, unlike in the United States, legal marriage is not the dominant form of coupling in Jamaica and the Afro-Caribbeans, “common-law marriages”\(^{21}\) and “visiting unions”\(^{22}\) being equally socially acceptable (Kerr [1952] 1963; Henriques 1953; Smith 1956; Clarke [1957] 1999; Goode 1964; Chevannes 1992). Admittedly, this social acceptance has not always existed, as Bauer and Thompson (2006, 8) recall

> the prejudice which has for so long been expressed by many commentators on Jamaican family life. For more than two centuries, most commentators have been much more critical than flattering.

Chamberlain (2006, 36) traces the revisionist view of the Jamaican family structure to the 1970s when taking a more positive, functionalist view studies

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\(^{20}\) Stone (2007) contracted the virus from her husband.

\(^{21}\) “Common law husbands” and “common law wives” were included as a category for the first time in the Jamaica Census of 1943 (Henriques, 1953).

\(^{22}\) The “union” of a man and woman who are in a steady sexual relationship but do not live together. In 1970, “visiting relationship” was introduced into the Census. In 2004, Chevannes urged that these relationships should be “recognised by church and state as legitimate unions . . . since communities, sociologists and anthropologists already recognize them as real” (Jamaica Observer “All Woman” column, July 12).
began to nuance the typologies of families and to explore the functions performed by flexible mating behavior in terms of family survival, seeing these as adaptations to the particular constraints imposed by, and solutions to, poverty in the region.

Indeed, there is still no consensus among observers of this variety of Jamaican conjugal relationships: some scholars claim them to be forerunners of the postmodern, more creative way of coupling, while others maintain that they have destroyed Jamaica’s social fabric. Resistance is seen particularly in the upper echelons of Jamaican society and the churches.

Legal marriage therefore remains the ideal conjugal relationship and Jamaican women esteem marriage as the “ultimate aspiration,” an overarching life goal, a status marker that sets them apart, even above, their less fortunate unmarried sisters. Simms (2004) notes that marriage and the status of wife have served in many subtle ways to create a tension between young single women and married women. This situation is sometimes reflected in “Yu have the ring, but mi have the man.”

Jamaican men also esteem marriage as an important rite of passage even though, like other men, they express a fear of commitment because “marriage have teet (teeth).” During the entertainment portion of the 2004 annual Caribbean Studies Association (CSA) meeting in St. Kitts, a male comedian elicited a burst of laughter from the crowd when he declared that “West Indian woman ‘fraid lizard and cockroach, but West Indian man ‘fraid marriage, pain, doctor.”

What both husbands and wives in the West Indies hold in common is the fear of divorce, which they regard as the ultimate solution to marital problems (Chevannes 2001; Stone 2007). Many Jamaicans “would prefer to suffer in a disastrous marriage rather than get divorced,” an Observer columnist wrote in 2006. In fact, under Jamaican law a divorce may only be granted if a

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marriage “is proven to have ‘broken down irretrievably’” (Luton 2010) and the court actually requires a couple to seek counseling before petitioning for a divorce.

Bourdieu (1990, 69) notes the importance of history for an understanding of marriage:

Matrimonial strategies are often the outcome of power relationships within the domestic group and these relationships can be understood only by appealing to the history of this group and in particular to the history of previous marriages.

In African societies from which Caribbean slaves came, some men legally practiced polygamy, marrying as many women as they could afford. Diop ([1959] 1990, 126) claims that polygamy was not unique to Africa and more linked to income and social status than to culture:

It is the specific trait of no single people; it has been and continues to be practiced by the upper classes of all countries, perhaps not in different degree, but in different forms. . . . In all these countries, without damage to the existing morality, this luxury was open to anyone, if he had the means. . . . Monogamy was the rule at the level of the mass of the people, particularly in Africa. . . . Thus, it is not rare to see members of the lower classes who, seeking to deceive themselves about their own social rank, marry several wives.”

Sutton and Makiesky-Barrow (1981, 373) also describe the West African family structure from which Caribbean slaves came:

West African models of family, kinship and friendship ties . . . provided cultural models that shaped . . . the forging of strong extended family ties; the centrality of the mother-child and sibling bonds; the importance ascribed to the role of mother in contrast to the role of wife; a positive view of sexuality and its identification with creativity and potency rather than with temptation and sinfulness; exogamous tendencies in the selection of conjugal partners; the application of kin terms to friends and public figures; respect for the powers of the elderly.

European colonizers of the Caribbean, however, were from societies where monogamous legal marriage—one husband, one wife—prevailed and Colonial Caribbean discouraged, even forbade, legal marriage among slaves. In 2007, anthropologist and former Prime Minister Edward Seaga described “some shameful sins of slavery:”
Enslaved men in Jamaica did not arrive . . . from family backgrounds in which they were itinerant “baby fathers.” They came from settled family structures of different types in which the father was an ever-present conjugal figure. It was . . . . under the conditions of slavery, that they were induced by slave owners to be promiscuous breeders in order to increase their progeny to multiply the number of slaves in the financial accounts of the plantation or in the field of their masters. They learned their lesson well, breeding females and leaving them to be burden-bearers who raised the family.\textsuperscript{26}

These historical references may help to explain why, although the majority of Jamaicans do not get legally married, legal marriage remains a core value and aspiration in Jamaica for both men and women,\textsuperscript{27} especially for women. Douglass (1992, 197-98) found that wives “have a status in Jamaica that women cannot gain otherwise,” which explains why most of them are reluctant to give up the “honor” of the title, “Mrs.,” even when the marriage has long ended. Simms (2004) notes:

Many upstanding married women insist on the proper pronunciation of “mistress” in order that their status is not undermined by Ms. or Miss when they are being addressed . . . . I sometimes wonder if this is a deep-seated need to regain the dignity and authority of which [they] have been robbed over the past 500 years.

Jamaican journalist Tony Robinson (“Teerob”), in a 2006 column, “Daddy Oh,” in the \textit{Sunday Observer},\textsuperscript{28} quipped that marriage “works so well” for Jamaican women that “even bad marriages . . . [are] a testimony that someone wanted them, chose them, picked them to be their bride.”

\textbf{Living Apart Together (LAT)\textsuperscript{29} Marriages}

Living Apart Together (LAT) marriages, in which spouses have “separate apartments or homes . . . with private time and space a priority within a long-term committed relationship”

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Daily Gleaner}, February 4, G-3.
\textsuperscript{27} Compare the Jamaican marriage rate (7.53 per 1,000 in 2011, STATIN) and the U.S. rate, 6.8 per 1,000 in 2011 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, FastStats, http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/marriage-divorce.htm).
\textsuperscript{28} The second daily newspaper, established in 1993.
\textsuperscript{29} Also written as L.A.T.
(Francoeur 2006), were unfamiliar to my respondents, and to me, before this study. Originally seen in Europe but now more common in the United States and Canada, these marriages are said to appeal particularly to spouses who are set in their ways, for example older couples whose lives are filled with children and memorabilia from previous marriages (Rosenblum 2013), and couples whose previous spouses have died (Gierveld 2004). However, first-time couples are also embracing this relatively new marital relationship, especially young professionals who believe that cohabitation will rob them of their individuality and independence. Journalist and author Judith Newman (2007) cites U.S. Census data that “3.8 million married couples . . . don’t reside under the same roof.”

Bennett (2007) groups the couples that she discusses (aged between 35 and 59) in Britain as “gladly apart,” “regretfully apart,” and “undecidedly apart.” Some commentators, like Jill Brooke (2006), consider these LAT marriages evidence of “a [modern] growing unwillingness to compromise, particularly among members of a generation known for their self-involvement.” On the other hand, Levin (2004) seems to hail this marital relationship as “having the potential of becoming the third stage in the process of the social transformation of intimacy.” Francoeur (2006), evolutionary biologist and editor of the Continuum Complete International Encyclopedia of Sexuality (CCIES), 2004-2006, claims that “in one sense, LAT is a very old and traditional way of life,” dating back to “the agricultural world of Old Europe” when wealthy young married couples remained apart in their parents’ homes until they could afford homes of their own.

30 Sweden since 1993 (Levin 2004; Adams and Trost 2005); the Netherlands (Gierveld 2004), and Britain (Haskey 2005).
Indeed, the prohibitive cost of housing in some locations in the United States is one stated reason for the popularity of these relationships among younger couples.

Unlike LAT couples, however, who deliberately choose this lifestyle at the outset of their marriages, live near each other and sleep together regularly in either of their two residences as a normal everyday occurrence, this study’s Jamaican respondents did not make living apart an initial goal and visits to each other were far less frequent. Moreover, LAT couples are not exposed to the transnational and transcultural influences which the Jamaican couples face. On the other hand, LAT wife Chrissy Iley’s comment reported by Francoeur (2006) could have been made by some of these Jamaican transnational spouses:

This works for me because everybody needs an autonomous zone. Everyone needs love, but everyone needs space to feel that love. . . . People fall out of marriages not because one day they wake up out of love, but often because they are crushed under the weight of domestic trivia. They become emotionally claustrophobic.

**Colonialism and Slavery**

Afro-Caribbean partnering relationships and the resulting family structure are generally considered the result of colonialism and slavery (Patterson 1998; Lazarus-Shepherd 2001). One can hardly discuss Caribbean society without referring to slavery, an integral part of Caribbean history. Smith (1957, 90) describes the colonial plantation as a “peculiar kind of instrument for the re-socialization of those who fell within its sphere of influence.” Harvard-based Jamaican sociologist Orlando Patterson (1998) describes slavery as “one long, externally imposed familial crisis . . . [of which] the single most devastating effect . . . [was] the impact on the roles of father and mother and husband.” In a 2006 television program in Jamaica, Orville Taylor, a sociology professor at the University of the West Indies (UWI), pointed out that on the plantation it was

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impossible for male slaves to develop loyalty to women or children and that this lack of loyalty is still “sticking with . . . [Jamaicans] like a bad case of chicken pox.”

Since African slaves in the Caribbean were generally not allowed to marry and when they formed conjugal relationships these were often brutally severed when partners were sold to different plantation owners, intimate relationships often had to be pursued clandestinely, often across large distances. Yet slaves seem to have become so accustomed to this “friendin,” or maintaining intimate relations while living apart, that when slavery ended they were in no hurry to be married. This led upper class Jamaicans, in imitation of the colonial masters, to try to impose legal marriage as the morally right basis for family formation (Clarke 1957; French 1987; Douglass 1992), and in the 1940s a Marriage Movement involving mass weddings was spearheaded by Lady Molly Huggins, wife of the then-Governor of Jamaica, and Mary Morris Knibb, a prominent Moravian and the first female Councilor of the Kingston and St. Andrew Corporation (KSAC):

Mrs. Knibb acquired wedding rings in bulk and sold these for 10 shillings to bring them within the reach of the ordinary people. A total of 150 mass weddings were held. There was a massive public campaign in the press, through the churches, and through national and local organizations to encourage poor women to accept the “dignity” of marriage as a solution to their economic problems.

However, Sistren’s dramatic re-enactment, *Wid Dis Ring* (French 1987), claims that poor Jamaican women saw quickly through this attempt to “confine [them] to di yard like house slave an’ prisoner,” for men to “Lord it over [them] because dem a give . . . money.” When told by “the welfare lady” that “God ordained that we should have one lawful spouse, and that couples should stick together in sickness and in health, for better or for worse,” Adina retorts, 

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34 TVJ weekly program, “Your Issues Live,” 15 June, 8:00 p.m. moderated by news anchor Michal Sharpe. This segment was titled, “Do You Think Most Jamaican Men Are Living Up to Their Responsibilities?”

35 French 1987, 29.
“Mi nuh tink God so wicked, ‘im couldn’ waan woman fi live inna slavery [I don’t think God is so wicked, He couldn’t want women to live in slavery]. Jesus did marry Mary Magdalene?”36

The Marriage Movement was short-lived. Smith (1957, xxiii) reports that the “marriage rate moved from 4.44 per thousand to 5.82 in 1946 but dropped soon after.”

Interestingly, the colonial master’s legal marriage upheld for society to emulate did not embrace fidelity as an intrinsic value. During slavery, the master would leave his legal wife in the “big house” to visit his “slave-wife”37; after slavery, he continued to have extramarital relations with his domestic servants and other ‘outside’ women. Colonialism and slavery may have therefore produced an ideology of “manhood” to include sexual prowess, multiple partners, and multiple children, and “womanhood” as synonymous with the use of sexual relations for survival, both within and outside of marriage. The legal wife was the ‘Madonna,’ placed on a pedestal at home, and the other, outside woman, was the ‘whore,’ both women being unequally ‘yoked’ to a man who could easily abuse them but with the legal wife enjoying a higher social status. In December 2004 at a church service commemorating World AIDS Day, the gender specialist Glenda Simms, responding to the Minister of Health’s statement that in Jamaica “married women are among the groups of persons most at risk of contracting the deadly virus,” described this pattern:

By the 19th century the tendency for men to place their wives on a pedestal was very much in vogue. This position was against the dominant view that wife types were gentle, fragile and less belligerent than the common whores and viragos that have such love for gentlemen. The pedestal became the defining slot for the wives, and according to Mills, served to justify ‘male philandering and adultery’ and the shackling of the middle-class woman to the house.

Male “Marginality”

36 French 1987, 15.
Relevant to this discussion of the effect of colonialism and slavery on Afro-Caribbean legal marriage is Errol Miller’s suggestion (1986; 1991, 70) of another offshoot of Afro-Caribbean history: “male marginality . . . exist[ing] in Afro-Caribbean society as far back as slavery, that is, before 1834,” in which

the father’s place in the family was never secure. He had no externally sanctioned authority over the family or household and could be physically removed from it at any time.”

Miller implies that this “marginality” placed Afro-Caribbean “men at risk” and still impedes them from healthy social functioning. This male-marginality theory is hotly rejected by Caribbean female scholars (Sutton and Makiesky-Barrow 1981; Besson 1993; D’Amico 1993; Barrow 1998; Mohammed [1988] 1999; Barritteau 2003; Reddock 2004) as a “non-theory” (Barritteau 2003). As Barritteau (2003) shows, the slave mother’s “place in the family” was no more “secure” than that of the father, but she soon learned to work the system to her advantage:

The slave woman was not a ward of her father, husband, or brother and did not derive her status from her position as wife and mother; nor were her activities centred primarily on domestic and family life . . . . [L]aboring in the field alongside the men, slave women were forced to deal with organizational structures of power and authority, and thus they acquired a knowledge of how the system worked and a consciousness of their oppressed and victimized status within it.

Deere et al. (1990, 10) also describe the slave woman’s role:

In the British Caribbean, slavery established the importance of women as workers and providers, which was not seen as incompatible with their reproductive role as wives and mothers.

Therefore, when Bobb-Smith’s (2003, 24) female Caribbean Canadian respondent states that women

are the key to the survival of the African race in the Caribbean – the women, the strength that we have. When the men will get a little downhearted, the women will fight relentlessly. We have that determination, that inner strength
this statement may be seen, not as a confirmation of Miller’s view that Afro-Caribbean men are somehow “marginal” but as an affirmation of Sutton and Makiesky-Barrow’s assertion (1981, 373) that Afro-Caribbean women, abroad and at home, are just continuing to do what they have always done to survive:

Slave women, like men, surely used whatever weapons were available, including sex, in the struggle to resist degradation and to make a better life for themselves.

Miller’s theory is, however, still evoked by Jamaican male scholars in gender discussions, as evidenced in Taylor’s 2006 article, “Whose ‘agender’?” in the Sunday Gleaner of November 26:

Errol Miller’s argument that men are at risk is solid, because more women are occupying the ranks of the senior professions than men . . . . There is a direct correlation between the increase in crimes against women and the under-achievement of males . . . . [M]ost young men don’t have recourse to a sugar daddy (well some do) to back them up economically. For all the progress of young women, it is young men who are at risk . . . . We seek equality, not special treatment because one is female.

Within Miller’s theory, a “marginalized” husband who remains in Jamaica because he cannot obtain a visa lacks opportunity; with a visa, he lacks the resilience to face the challenges of the new host society. The novelist Paule Marshall’s ([1959] 1981) Barbadian protagonist Merle, after much struggle, grows tired of making excuses for her unresilient, unadaptable, “marginalized” husband who has accompanied her to New York and divorces him.

**Childhood Socialization and Gender Norms**

Childhood socialization theory states that adult behavior is determined by a child’s socialization by its parents, society and culture (Erikson 1950, 1959). Goode (1963, 28) considered this “anticipatory socialization” to be of critical importance to marriage:

The process of entering marriage begins in the Western family system, as in all family systems, from the moment of the first socialization experiences. These impress on the child his duties as well as rewards in assuming his status as male
or female. The experiences prepare the child, by anticipatory socialization, for the adult roles of date or fiancé, husband and wife, kinsman, and so on.

As earlier mentioned, it is widely recognized that Afro-Caribbean boys and girls are socialized to move in different spheres (Phillips 1976 (1973); Kincaid 1997; Brown and Chevannes 1998; Leo-Rhynnie 1998; Reddock 2004). Bobb-Smith (2003, 39, citing Senior 1991, 25-43)) found, from her Caribbean Canadian respondents, that this “socialization process differs only in degree among Caribbean people who are materially distinct in class.” Almost from birth gendered childhood socialization in Jamaica, as in other parts of the world, entails boys learning to be strong and tough and girls to be feminine and useful. As the only girl in my family, I learned early to “tidy house” and clean my older brother’s shoes and I was forbidden by my father to wear pants, or ride a bike. Young children are even scolded in a gendered way. This is noticeable in the school setting, among parents called in for disciplinary meetings and even among teachers themselves, a common reprimand for boys being, “Stop the crying! You ah girl? [Are you a girl?]”

The spatial dimension is added at the onset of puberty when girls and boys can no longer play together. Girls’ activities outside the home are strictly curtailed for fear of pregnancy, while boys are offered the freedom of the streets in order to become men (Barrow 1998; Brown and Chevannes 1998). Brown and Chevannes use the analogy of cattle: parents “tie the heifer and loose the bull.” Author Jamaica Kincaid (1997) complains passionately about this aspect of growing up in Antigua, her island of origin. The Jamaican teenage boy is socialized to be a sexual, specifically heterosexual being, proving his virility, his manliness, by ‘sowing his wild oats’ far and wide, while the teenage girl is ‘locked down’ at home, taught that sexual relations

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38 Norms may be changing, as Jamaican singer Tanya Stephens railed against this practice in “Do You Still Care,” a reggae song against gender inequalities at the launching of Regional (HIV/AIDS) Testing Day in Kingston in 2011.

39 Because of the known homophobia of Jamaican society.
are not only harmful, but ‘dirty’. The Madonna-whore dichotomy continues intergenerationally, with the ‘good’ girls at home and the ‘bad’ girls, the ones who men will later declare are not “marriage material” (Chevannes 1992), in the streets. Dolly Parton’s lyrics in “Just Because I’m A Woman,” adapted by Jamaican singer Carlene Davis in her 1980s hit song, “My Mistake,” as “My mistakes are no worse than yours, Just because I’m a woman,” describe this scene perfectly:

A man will take a good girl  
And he’ll ruin her reputation  
But when he wants to marry  
Well, that’s a different situation  

He’ll just walk off and leave her  
To do the best she can  
While he looks for an angel  
To wear his wedding band.

Jamaican marital behavior seems influenced by this childhood socialization. Douglass (1992, 214) found that “the networks of men and women become further differentiated as they become adults and marry.” This differentiation seems to lead easily to the double standard of morality, permitting extramarital affairs for Jamaican husbands, but not for Jamaican wives. Douglass (1992, 171) points out how unrealistic it is to expect the simple ceremony of marriage to convert the boys described above into men who suddenly “settle down and cease womanizing.” Claiming that “every Jamaican knows” that many men do not stop “womanizing” after marriage, she describes (1992, 172) a typical wedding speech:

[T]he wedding speaker did not joke about [the bride’s] . . . premarital sexual behavior. Although it would not necessarily be presumed or expected that she did not have a premarital sexual life, it would be impolite to speculate about a particular woman’s sexuality. A man’s sexual activity, however, is a common and more open subject of discussion.
Within legal marriage, Jamaican childhood socialization may translates into a husband’s perception that sex with “the wife” is for childbearing, while with the other woman it is for personal pleasure, a perception that some churches in Jamaica are now actively trying to change.\(^\text{40}\) To have both “Wifey” and “Matey” is some husbands’ dream, while their wives must cleave to them alone. This double standard of morality is a constant theme in theatrical performances, which are as noted for their satire as for their humor. For example, in “Gun Court Affair,” a popular play in 1975 Jamaica the husband, played by Ed “Bim” Lewis of the famed comedy duo, “Bim and Bam,” sang to his “wife,” then popular entertainer Hyacinth Clover, “I want my wife and my sweetheart to be friends.” When his wife finally substituted “husband” for “wife” and sang the same verse back to him, he exploded, “Don’t you dare say that to me again!”

That Jamaican and Afro-Caribbean wives endure their husbands’ infidelity, even when outside children are born, may result more from their being socialized as girls to accept these norms of masculinity and femininity than from the sex ratio imbalance alluded to by Miller’s (1991, 226) female respondent as she describes her partnering “options”

> either to settle for a whole of a “half-a-man” [a “man who functioned effectively and satisfyingly in bed and in other physical and mechanical respects but was inadequate socially, financially and educationally”] or a half or a third or even a quarter of a whole man. The prospect of getting the whole of a whole man for herself seemed bleak.

Social and cultural tolerance of husbands’ infidelity may also explain why, in the transnational marriages under review, emigrant wives pretend to ignore the other woman in Jamaica and why this other woman may be content to spend over a decade in a situation which may result quite unfavorably for her. If the husband dies, for example, the emigrant wife is still his legal beneficiary.

\(^{40}\) See Chapter III.
Gendered childhood socialization may also lead to gendered expectations of marriage. Douglass (1992, 172) found that the “different [marriage] experiences of [Jamaican] men and women derive from the divergent ways Jamaicans define what it means to be a man or a woman.” For example, popular perception asserts that financial support and a nice home (mentioned by wives in this study and discussed in Chapter V) are more important to Jamaican wives, whereas satisfaction of more basic needs, like food and sex, is more important to Jamaican husbands.

Respectability vs. Reputation

A corollary of the abovementioned childhood socialization is Wilson’s claim (1969) that Afro-Caribbean men are interested in their “reputation” while women strive to maintain their “respectability.” This theory is linked with the “marginality” theory above as Afro-Caribbean gender studies discuss strong, independent mothers and absentee fathers (Ellis 1986; Miller 1991; Chevannes 1992, 2001; Brown and Chevannes 1998). A similar “construction of femininity” and “formation of masculinity” is noted by Bao (2005, 23) among the Thai middle class:

A middle-class woman gains class respectability by controlling her sexual behavior and being a chaste wife and a devoted mother. In contrast, a man’s middle-class respectability is articulated by becoming a breadwinner and a womanizer.

When Afro-Caribbean boys are allowed to run the streets, they gain for themselves a “reputation” as men among their peers, while girls kept close to home maintain the “respectability” of themselves and their families (Barrow 1998). Besson (1993, 362) notes that:

the significance of motherhood in conferring personal status among Afro-Caribbean women, paralleling the central significance of virility in establishing men’s reputations, is widely indicated in the regional literature.
This theory of respectability vs. reputation is further discussed in Chapter V in analyzing the study’s results.

Social Class

The Jamaican class system is another relic of colonialism and slavery that is relevant to this inquiry into Jamaican migration and marriage 41 because, unlike Americans who claim that their society is classless because they “have no queen, lords or ladies,” Jamaicans are unabashedly class-conscious. Arguably, Rawlins (2006, 10) classifies Jamaican society as “10 per cent of the population living in luxury while the poorest 10 per cent struggle each day to eke out a living,” the middle class comprising the 80 percent in between.

With regard to migration, it is important to note that the richest and poorest Jamaicans are not represented in this study, as it is mainly the middle class in Jamaica and the Afro-Caribbean that emigrates (Gopaul-McNicol 1993). The poorest Jamaicans usually cannot even qualify for a visitor visa, as they cannot provide the U.S. Embassy with sufficient financial evidence that they will not ‘overstay’ and upper-class Jamaicans, who Douglass (1992, 48) describes as

intimately familiar with North American society because they have homes and do business in Florida or New York. At the very least, they regularly travel to Miami to visit or shop,

do not migrate. They sojourn, rather than settle, abroad for the purposes of tertiary education or job opportunities, and return home to Jamaica at the earliest opportunity.

When these parents want their children to study abroad, they do not have to go to prepare a place for them; they can afford to just send them. Their children are more reminiscent of Asian “parachute” children 42 than the children usually found in Caribbean migration literature:

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41 Independent since 1962, Jamaica still has a Governor General, who represents the British Queen.
42 “Young people from the age of about eight to seventeen, who are sent to California to attend school (so they will gain entry to prestigious colleges and jobs) while their parents remain in Taiwan, Hong Kong, or mainland China.
[They] usually spend a few years abroad to study, travel, and work for a period before returning to settle down at home. There is a commonly held view that this sojourn abroad is necessary to quell the travel bug and to learn about the wider world. It also provides a chance to prove that one is not relying solely on family power, money, and connections to succeed. . . . Within a few years after college, a young man or woman is expected to return home. Most do, in fact, desire to return to the place where they have a community of family and where their name has meaning.\footnote{Douglass, 1992, 118-19.}

Even when these upper-class adult children marry foreign spouses, Douglass found, they still do not settle abroad. It was exceptional, therefore, during the two terms of former Prime Minister Michael Manley (1972-1980) when larger numbers than ever before of this upper class of Jamaicans emigrated from political strife and the fear of social change, perceiving Manley’s ‘socialist experiment’ as a threat to their accustomed way of life (Anderson 1985, 118), and most of these migrants have since returned home to Jamaica.\footnote{Lately, however, social problems like the rise in crime, the deterioration of the economy, and the decrease in availability and quality of medical care, have led more of the upper classes to at least contemplate migration.}

With regard to marriage, Douglass (1992) notes that Jamaicans tend to marry within their social class and that the upper class sets the social trends for the other classes to follow. Clarke (1957, 61, 62) noted a sharp difference in how Jamaican upper and lower social classes discussed their sexuality:

\begin{quote}
Among the upper class farmers and their wives, it was difficult, if not impossible, to discuss the subject of sex. Whenever it was introduced it was shied away from. . . . one citizen thought such questions “out of order.”
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
[Among the lower classes] sex was a favourite subject of conversation with both men and women. Men enjoyed talking about their sexual prowess, the number of children they had fathered and the number of their conquests, referring with special pride to any relationship with a virgin. Both men and women regarded sexual activity as a normal part of adult and adolescent life, and there was never any attempt to temper the discussion if children were present. Childish and adolescent precocity was, on the contrary, regarded with tolerant amusement and, in the case of boys, with admiration.”
\end{quote}

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This class-specific reaction to sexuality was corroborated in this study: the more a respondent could be identified as “lower middle class,” the easier it was to have an open discussion about the intimacies of marriage.

**The Individual Life Course**

For most people the marriage contract is a significant life-event. Clausen (1985, 134) declares that the “transition from single to married status . . . [is] one of the most fateful changes of status to occur during the whole life course.” The “top 15 stressor” list of the Holmes-Rahe Life Events Rating Scale, used by psychologists to measure stress, includes six marital events (Kowalski and Westen [2002] 2011):

1. Death of spouse  
2. Divorce  
3. Marital separation  
7. Marriage  
9. Marital reconciliation  
13. Sex difficulties.

It is noteworthy that marriage itself, although a “top stressor,” is less stressful than the negative results that it may entail, death of spouse, divorce, and marital separation being at the top of the list. Only “marital reconciliation” and “sex difficulties” are rated lower on the scale than marriage itself. The implication is that, while it is stressful to get married, it is even more stressful as time passes and you separate, divorce, or your spouse dies. On the other hand, it is less stressful to reconcile and “sex difficulties” are the least stressful marital events.

Indeed, time and its events affect all marriages. Since the married couples in this study have lived apart for at least a decade and in one case for as long as thirty years, there are life stages to be considered (Erikson 1963, 1980; Clausen 1985; Kaufman 1986; Handel 2000;
Both spouses can expect to mature and change in response to life experiences. Chamberlain (2006, 83) claims that

[i]n thinking about the African-Caribbean family it is as well to remember that the conjugal relationship is but a passing moment in the history of the family. Far stronger, in the context of the Caribbean and its diaspora, are ties of consanguinity, affinity and lineage.

By the time older wives have migrated, that “moment” may have already passed–childbearing, for example, may have ended. Other kin and non-kin relationships may indeed become as fulfilling, if not more so, than the relationship between husband and wife.

Marriage expectations may also diverge, the longer spouses are apart and the older they become, and already gendered expectations may become more gendered with time. The left-behind husband who is happy to ‘run the streets’ in his 30s may crave the companionship of a wife at home when he enters his fifth or sixth decade. Faced with the physical changes of growing older in Jamaica without his legal wife, children and grandchildren, he may come to agree with the American man, quoted in Marriage: Just a Piece of Paper? (Anderson et al. 2002, 178), that it is better to be “single at twenty than single at fifty. It makes an extremely big difference.” Hondagneu-Sotelo (1992, 403) speaks of Mexican men who enjoy “the life of an independent migrant, free of the constraints and daily responsibilities imposed by a wife and children.” Both Jamaican spouses may initially enjoy the independence of transnational living, the wife free from constantly sacrificing her comfort for that of her husband, the husband free from having to please his wife. Over time, however, this ‘freedom’ may wear thin.

Kaufman (1986, 18) found that it is “the ways in which . . . events are interpreted by individuals in relation to the passage of time that have a greater potential for explaining the process of change and continuity in later life.” An immigrant wife’s shift in attitude may result, not just from her exposure to American society–in Goodison’s short story, it only takes a year for
Bella to change her look and her attitude— but also from entering a new stage in her life course—grandparenthood, for example. Erikson (1963, 263-269) states that the major concern of old age, the last stage of ego development, is “ego integrity vs. despair.” “Ego integrity” he defines as “the acceptance of one’s one and only life cycle as something that had to be and that, by necessity, permitted of no substitutions,” whereas despair “expresses the feeling that the time is now short, too short for the attempt to start another life and to try out alternate roads to integrity. Disgust hides despair.” Unexpectedly, most left-behind husbands in this study seemed on the road to this “ego integrity,” whereas many immigrant wives seemed closer to “disgust” and “despair.”

In her 2006 study of 200 Jamaican working- and middle-class “midlife and older women” aged fifty to seventy-four, Rawlins (2006, 118) found that her widow respondents expressed a “discourse of liberation,” a “repressed discourse,” tinged with ambivalence:

Their lives were better after widowhood; they were more independent, they had more freedom, and they were able to make better use of their time than had been the case when they were married. . . . At the same time as they celebrated their new autonomy they mourned the loss of companionship and the economic loss.

Some of the Jamaican immigrant wives in this study seemed to experience similar ambivalence when, having achieved all their goals, they are growing old without the companionship of their husbands. An additional concern is that women tend to outlive men. Citing the low ratio of Caribbean men to women “60 years and over” from a United Nations report on aging, Best (2002) noted the “worry” of “women . . . nearing retirement age” that they will not find “a man to provide companionship in the latter years.” Barbados had the lowest ratio in the region, 62 men to 100 women, but Jamaica’s ratio was actually higher (84 to 100) than that of the United States (76 per 100). However, Rawlins (2006, 8) does not report this “worry” among the women in Jamaica that she interviewed, noting that
women who have not married by the time they are in their fifties eventually separate from their common-law partners and continue to have their children and grandchildren live with them.

Bobb-Smith (2003, 36) does not report this “worry” either among the women she interviewed in Canada. She found that “older Caribbean women were consistently self-reliant, in spite of limited formal education, restricted autonomy, and little or no dependence on spousal unions.”

It may be that the longer Jamaican immigrant wives have to be self-reliant in transnational marriages, the less willing they may be to resume cohabitation with their husbands, especially if cohabitation means return migration to Jamaica when they have become accustomed to life in the United States.

**The Ethnographic Method and Presentation of the Self**

Kotlowitz (2002) comments with regard to the PBS FRONTLINE’s “Let’s Get Married” study that marriage, the “most private of institutions, has very public consequences. And yet we have such a tough time talking about it. Why is that?” My “insider status” (Agar, 1980) as a Jamaican immigrant wife (perhaps three strikes against me), led me to suspect from the outset that talking about legal marriage with Jamaicans would be problematic, both because Jamaicans hesitate to discuss their private lives in public and because of the aforementioned cultural double standard of morality. Simms (2004) found that:

> the competing tensions of the dominant institutions (home, school, church and all related governing structures) produce a difficult emotional climate in which honesty about one’s sexuality is curtailed. It is this lack of open dialogue, secrecy and fear that prevent far too many women from participating in the kinds of discussions that will save their lives.

I was concerned that both husbands and wives might attempt to keep me from accessing their “backstage” (Goffman 1959, 112), or that husbands might proudly exaggerate their sexual exploits while wives might be reluctant to reveal intimate details about themselves, especially
about their sexuality. My childhood best friend reinforced this suspicion when she prefaced her email return of the wife questionnaire with the disclaimer, “Only you could get me to do this.”

Some useful information may indeed have been distorted or withheld from me, intentionally or unintentionally, since all respondents, not just wives, seemed anxious to “present [themselves to me] . . . in a light . . . favorable to [themselves]” (Goffman 1959, 7). Smith (1957, xlvii) noted the “vicarious self-exculpations” of Jamaicans, which he considered the result of

the pattern of self-vindication which Madeline Kerr\(^{45}\) identified as distinctively Jamaican, and perhaps West Indian . . . which left respondents free to attribute responsibility as they willed, without any objective checks, and to misinterpret or rationalize their attitudes, motivations, goals, experiences and circumstances.

One wife respondent actually warned, “It will be hard to do the kind of work you’re doing because people don’t want to admit their past–you’ll have to find people who will tell you the truth.”

I was also keenly aware of the controversy concerning the efficacy of the life story as research method, including the problem of accurate recall, as respondents might genuinely forget, or choose not to remember, a sequence of events or their motives at a particular time in the past. Clausen (1985, 62) theorizes that “each of us has a story to tell about our lives, but the story changes over the years. . . . it changes as our identity itself changes.” Kaufman (1986, 14) makes a similar claim:

The self draws meaning from the past, interpreting and recreating it as a resource for being in the present . . . . Old people formulate and reformulate personal and cultural symbols of their past to create a meaningful, coherent sense of self, and in the process they create a viable present.

Patterson (1998, xix) goes further:

A great deal of the nonsociological writings on Afro-American gender and family relations rely heavily on autobiographical or anecdotal sources, which is perhaps the main reason why the crisis in these relations has been either misinterpreted, underestimated, swept under the rug, or denied altogether.

In my interviews I made a determined effort to be Agar’s (1980) “professional stranger,” to prevent my insider status from influencing my findings and slanting my perceptions. I had to constantly “de-indexalize,” to avoid the “interference from . . . [my] own ways of thinking, feeling and acting” (Agar 1980, 5-6). I had to draw upon all available methods, including “feminist” techniques of listening and responding “in a new way” in order to “hear what women implied, suggested, and started to say but didn’t. . . . to interpret their pauses and . . . their unwillingness or inability to respond.” I was also careful to assure respondents of confidentiality. Reporting of interviews was actually more difficult because of the need to protect respondents’ privacy. My “Jamaicanness” was an advantage in participant observation, as I knew instinctively where to look and what to observe. As the work proceeded, I remained convinced of the applicability of the life story method to this study, especially when I saw how delighted some respondents were to find that their experiences and reflections were deemed worthy of scholarly interest. I was led to agree with Chamberlain (2006, 7, 10) that

[t]he paucity of conventional sources on family history means that life stories and oral histories have become an important source, as well as offering the possibility of observing families from the inside. . . . Life stories can, therefore, reveal the specificities of social and cultural practice, and guard against assuming that one model of social or cultural organization can (or should) explain all.

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46 Agar defines “indexicality” as the “amount of shared background knowledge necessary to understand a message.”
48 Ibid, 17.
CHAPTER III

THE STUDY OF WIVES ABROAD, HUSBANDS AT HOME

The researcher . . . must be at the location, not only to watch but also to listen to the symbolic sounds that characterize the world. A dialogue with persons in their natural situation will reveal the nuances of meaning from which their perspectives and definitions are continually forged.

–Schatzman and Strauss 1973

Foreword

In the interest of reliability and to facilitate further discussion of Jamaican legal marriage beyond this study, a brief description of the research and its respondents is included as this chapter rather than as an appendix.

The Sample

My sample was small but diverse. Respondents ranged from my childhood best friend to a wife whom I met in my dentist’s waiting-room in New York to a husband who was the grounds man in a school in Jamaica where I taught to another wife whom I met on a plane on her annual visit to her husband in Jamaica. The qualification for inclusion in the study, as stated earlier, was that couples should have lived apart—in Jamaica and the United States—for at least ten years and be still married. For comparative purposes, however, I also held conversations with a few spouses who had lived apart for a shorter time, as well as with one couple that had not lived apart, but had migrated together to New York City and recently celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary. I interviewed single spouses when their partners were unavailable, and in the case of couples for which no spouse was available for interview, kinfolk (friends and relatives) spoke on their behalf, albeit second-hand. Five couples were the perfect subjects: they had lived apart for 10 to 21 years in the United States and Jamaica and both spouses and their children were available for interview.
Questionnaires (Appendix B) were generally used as an interview guide, but were completed by four respondents instead of, or in addition to, being interviewed. I sometimes learned more from casual conversation, when respondents felt more at ease, than from the actual interview—often a conversation would start when the questionnaire was not present. No planned focus groups were arranged as the information was thought too private to be shared in a group setting. With regard to “truth-telling,” responses were accepted at face value even when some were questionable, for example, when a self-proclaimed “kinky” husband respondent claimed that he had "had sex with 869 women, kept count out of respect, and could remember all of the women’s surnames but one." I cross-referenced what I heard from respondents both with what I already knew of them and with relevant information gathered from participant observation of Jamaican society and culture, which proved invaluable for the analysis of their responses.

The Respondents

Forty-nine (49) individuals (Figure 1 below) were interviewed for this study, in areas where I lived or had relatives and friends: New York, Florida, and the Washington, DC area in the United States; and Kingston and Lucea1 in Jamaica. They consisted of: 11 wives; 16 husbands; 11 adult children (nine female, two male); two other women; one other man; one left-behind adult son who wanted to speak about his parents’ experience although they were unmarried; and seven other relatives and friends (all female) who provided second-hand information about couples who were unavailable for interview. Wives, husbands, the other women and other man were all first-generation Jamaicans, ranging in age from 48 to 84; adult children respondents were first-, 1.5- and second-generation Jamaicans in their 20s and 30s, except for one adult daughter who was in her 50s and the left-behind son, who was in his 60s.

1 A small town on the northwestern coast of Jamaica and the capital of the parish of Hanover, Lucea lies halfway between the tourist destinations of Montego Bay and Negril. I taught high school there from 2005 to 2007.
All the wives in the study were married at an earlier age than their husbands. Respondents represented a cross-section of Jamaican lower to upper middle-class society, the majority consisting of educated professionals in a variety of careers. The first husband interviewed in New York was a City University of New York (CUNY) Graduate Center security guard; another husband was a self-employed driving instructor in Kingston. All couples were of predominantly African ancestry, except for one, who was second-generation Chinese. All identified themselves simply as Jamaican.

**Figure 1. Individual Respondents (49)**

The total number of couples surveyed was twenty-five (25) (Figure 2 below), of which five couples did not meet all the criteria for the sample but wanted to tell their stories so I listened, for comparative purposes. Of these five, one couple had migrated together, as mentioned above; two lived apart for only two years; and two lived apart with a spouse in a country other than the United States. Although 25 couples were surveyed, therefore, only 20

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2 For example, teacher, architect, agricultural officer, nurse, small business owner, engineer, office worker, policeman, homemaker.
made up the sample (Figure 3 below). Of these 20 couples, six couples were not interviewed, three being deceased, two with a wife alone alive but ill, and one that declined to be interviewed, saying it was “family business.” Adult children and close friends provided information on their behalf. The 20 couples in the sample had lived transnationally for ten to thirty years. In six couples, both spouses were available for interview. In five of these six, as mentioned above, adult children of the marriage were interviewed as well.

**Figure 2. Couples Surveyed (25)**

![Figure 2. Couples Surveyed (25)](image)

**Figure 3. Couples in Sample (20)**

![Figure 3. Couples in Sample (20)](image)
The Interviews

Individual questionnaires for each group—wives, husbands and adult children—were used to guide in-depth, semi-structured, interviews in the United States and Jamaica. Interviews were conducted between 2005 and 2007, in homes and public spaces, at the interviewees’ convenience. Ten of the forty-nine interviews were conducted by telephone; the others were face to face. As they were semi-structured, interviews were of varying length. Married wives and husbands were interviewed separately. My most memorable interview took place one Saturday in the Babies’ Room at the back of a church as the respondent was monitoring the sound quality for a wedding. We noted the irony of discussing marriage while watching, unobserved, the wedding taking place right before our eyes.

Couples were asked to reflect on their migration experience and its effect on their marriages. Adult children were asked to reflect on their experience of their parents’ transnational marriages. All interviewees were informed at the outset that they could choose not to reply to any questions that caused them embarrassment or discomfort, but that I hoped they might gain some benefit from the personal reflection involved. As customary, they were assured of absolute confidentiality and anonymity. I took special care to maintain in strictest confidence information shared by members of the same family, even if some family members seemed to give permission for such information to be shared.

Questions to husbands and wives were open-ended and covered the following topics: initial goals for and satisfaction with, their marriages; the migration experience; the living-apart experience, including frequency and nature of communications; sexuality and fidelity; general reflections on marriage and divorce; and their childhood socialization. Interviews of adult
children of the spouses were briefer, to elicit their thoughts on: marriage in general, and their parents’ marriage in particular; divorce; the effects of their parents’ living apart on the family; and whether they themselves would enter into a similar transnational marital arrangement.

Views of other women and the other man were sought to understand their role and function in the marriages under review. The interviewing process varied widely: some respondents needed to be constantly prompted with specific questions, while others spoke freely on their own.

Although my Institutional Review Board (IRB) clearance was meant to assure respondents of confidentiality and I promised them that my writing would ensure that they would not be individually recognizable, interviewees were not comfortable with recording, so I had to forego an aid that would have certainly facilitated the interview process.\(^3\) I therefore took rapid notes, for transcription immediately after the interviews. One older wife, in her 80s, even forbade my note-taking, declaring that I should “memorize:” “You’ll remember what you need to remember, what you want to remember—you’ll remember me.” Initially she surprised me with her cold formality, as she was a school friend’s cousin, but by the end of the hour-long interview the famed Jamaican hospitality surfaced, and she grew warm and loving, even offering me a bowl of soup.

Because of the personal nature of the questions, participants who preferred not to be interviewed were encouraged to provide written answers to the questions instead. Two wives exercised this option, which seemed to allow them to be more open with their responses. For example, one wife admitted on her questionnaire that she fulfilled her sexual needs by “masturbating occasionally.” something she may not have admitted in an interview. Two husbands filled in questionnaires in addition to being interviewed. The first husband in Jamaica

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\(^3\) Schwartz and Jacobs (1979, 47), however, caution that the “the tape recorder may be intimidating and bias the respondent’s account.”
to complete a questionnaire added a series of questions regarding the attitudes of his parents and
grandparents, which he thought may have shaped some of his attitudes and expectations and
would be helpful to my research. These questions queried his antecedents’ occupation and
religion; morality; views on enjoyment, play, nudity, and sexual relations; success of their
marriage; and show of affection for each other. I amended the husband and wife questionnaires
to include some of his questions in the section on childhood socialization.

As noted above, I spoke to more husbands (16) than wives (11). Four husbands, two in
their 60s and two in their 80s, boasted of their sexual prowess, as I originally expected (see
Chapter I), but to my surprise, so did one wife. This was the only wife to declare that she had
been unfaithful and she added that she had even told her husband. I sometimes found sexual
questions difficult to ask both men and women, especially the oldest respondents, as I did not
want to be perceived as disrespectful. In interviewing both wives and other women, I was
particularly aware, as Braithwaite (1957, 27) mentions, that

the “idea” of Jamaican and West Indian society is the male-centered monogamous
unit sanctioned by Christian ritual. Under these conditions the sexual relationships
of the single are surrounded with value judgments which may render responses in
interview misleading or negative.

Overall the husbands were courteous, restrained, and grateful to be heard. To my
surprise, they seemed much happier than the wives, who seemed more resigned than happy.
Husbands were noticeably generous with their time, as they genuinely sought to explain their
motives for remaining in Jamaica and to describe their transnational living experience over the
years. As long as they were in good health and their wives did not request a legal separation or

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4 One husband’s boasting seemed more psychological (from personal disappointment) than sociological (because he
was a Jamaican man), as his wife had recently decided the marriage was over and they were living separately back
in Jamaica.

5 She declared that her husband, even if he had an outside woman in Jamaica, would never leave her because
sexually she was “the best he had ever had.”
divorce, husbands expressed satisfaction with the living-apart arrangement. Interestingly, however, the husband who seemed most content declined to give me his wife’s contact information in the United States so I was unable to obtain her side of the story. Some spouses expressed concern about the future. The youngest wife ended her interview with the words, “I really want to go home! Keep me in your prayers.”

As expected, adult children spoke more about their reactions to their parents’ marriages than about the marriages themselves, the intricacies of which they knew little. The exception was the adult daughter who related her parents’ migration experience while she and I travelled on an early-morning bus from Lucea to Kingston. Her story was particularly interesting because she is the daughter of an other woman. She was certain her parents would grant me an interview and expressed deep surprise later when, declaring that it was “family business,” they refused her request on my behalf.

The seven female relatives and friends who provided information on couples who were not available for interview I considered secondary respondents and I accepted their observations in that light. I regretted not finding more other men and other women to interview because those three respondents contributed interestingly to the study. Fortunately, this gap was somewhat filled by my content analysis, especially by Goodison’s (1990) short story, a summary of which I use to introduce my analysis of the study’s results in Chapter V.

**The Participant Observation**

Participant observation of Jamaican society was an important corollary to my small sample and yielded relevant data. Bourdieu (1990, 191) states that “when it is guided by a principle of pertinence that allows one to construct the given for purposes of comparison and generalization, even reading the papers may become a scientific act.” Patton (1990, 71) declares
that “observation, eavesdropping, brief questioning, and casual conversation are . . . very important; they eventually provide a broad context for effective and economically interviewing.” Researchers of the Caribbean (Chamberlain, Bauer and Thompson, Vickerman—all 2006) have recorded emigrants’ idealization of life in their home country, which seems to grow with the length of absence. My re-acquaintance with Jamaican society during 2004 to 2007 proved invaluable for an understanding of pre-migration attitudes and current cultural norms, and to overcome the “problem of assessing people’s values from expressed attitude, and of evaluating the significance of expressed attitude to actual belief and behavior” (Braithwaite [1957] 2001, 22). All respondents acknowledged the two daily newspapers (the Gleaner and the Observer), radio, and television as the most important sources of information on Jamaican attitudes and values.

Conjugal relationships are a “hot topic” in Jamaica, constantly before the public gaze. Articles in the two daily newspapers revealed a steady preoccupation with legal marriage and outside affairs and gendered expectations and reactions. Features and columns regularly discussed male-female relationships, including legal marriage. The Sunday Gleaner carried: the “Doctor’s Advice” column; articles by Ian Boyne (“In Focus”) and Glenda Simms, a gender specialist and advisor to the government on gender affairs, then former Executive Director of the Women’s Affairs Bureau set up in the 1970s by Prime Minister Michael Manley; and the Outlook supplement, with its regular column by nutritionist and lifestyle consultant Heather Little-White, Ph.D.6 and articles on the topic of gender for men and women. The Sunday Observer featured: a tongue-in-cheek column, “Daddy-Oh,” by Tony Robinson (“Teerob”), and a more serious column by Mark A. Wignall. On Mondays, both daily newspapers included a

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6 Sadly, Dr. Little-White, who had survived but was paralyzed from a gunman’s bullet in 1999, passed on from illness in January 2013 and her husband committed suicide seven months later.
women’s supplement: the Gleaner’s Flair and the Observer’s All Woman. In the Wednesday Gleaner, Dr. Sidney McGill, marriage and family therapist, provided “Healthy Sex 101.”

Each Valentine’s Day, both papers presented interviews of couples in lengthy marriages, with titles such as “An Exciting Adventure” (26 years), “In Love Forever, We Were Friends First” (30+ years), and “Faces of Love” (58 years). On World AIDS Day in 2004, the opening paragraph of the Gleaner’s front-page story, “Bedtime Slaves,” discussed the increase in HIV/AIDS among married women, stating that

[Although Jamaican women are highly successful in the board rooms and in the educational sphere, many still are not able to dictate the terms of their sexual relationships and have become easy targets for HIV.

The author, Patricia Watson, blamed this on women’s “socialization” and the fact that “so-called ‘good’ women [the wives] never bring up condom use in the bedroom” while, for unmarried women,

transactional sex has become a major feature of relationships. The exchange factor has become more popular due to the “bling bling” culture and not only that, if the men will pay the utility bills, pay school fees, etc., then the women will not be inclined to insist on condom use.

Useful information was also gleaned from the popular radio call-in talk shows. On “Dear Pastor,” for example, heard from 9 p.m. to midnight from Monday to Thursday on Power 106 FM, Rev. Dr. Aaron Dumas, pastor and psychologist, answered questions and provided advice to callers, mostly on relationships. Author Veronica Carnegie provided a written transcript of some of his conversations in the Literary Arts section of the October 1, 2006 Sunday Gleaner. Even the weekly television program on religion, “Religious Hard Talk,” joined the discussion in

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7 Important in Jamaica, which still has a sizeable illiterate and semi-literate population. The Sunday Observer of May 9, 2004 carried staff reporter Vivienne Green-Evans’ article, “Men Are Going Back To School!” in which she cited the then-illiteracy rate at 14 percent for women and 26 percent for men. 8 The island’s first government-appointed marriage counselor, Dr. Dumas states that his goal is to inform and educate listeners on life issues and to encourage those with problems.
2006,\textsuperscript{9} when moderator Ian Boyne interviewed Rev. Carla Dunbar, Pastor of the Church of God Prophecy in Bull Bay,\textsuperscript{10} concerning sexual frustration among Christian couples, especially pastors and their wives.\textsuperscript{11} That same year, Rev. Winston Bell published \textit{Sex in the Church} and Family Life Ministries’ therapists and counsellors published articles in the \textit{Gleaner}, with titles such as “You are special”\textsuperscript{12} and “Breaking sexual addictions.”\textsuperscript{13} The latter article was a review of Audrey M. Haynes’ book, \textit{It’s A Different Movie (A Story of Young Love, Chastity in Conflict, and the Caribbean}. The effect of religion on Jamaican legal marriage is discussed further in Chapter IV.

Finally, references to theatrical performances, reggae music and Jamaican and Caribbean literature also appear in this study as they were useful in contextualizing interviewees’ responses. These artistic expressions constitute the popular culture of Jamaica. They are reflections of and shape popular understandings of everyday relations among and between the sexes. Goodison’s short story, “Bella Makes Life,” is insightful in its description of a Jamaican transnational marriage, specifically Joseph’s experience as a left-behind husband who struggles to keep his marriage intact. Some of Louise Bennett’s poems (1966), cited earlier, are descriptive of the migrant process, as is Barbadian author Paule Marshall’s novel, \textit{Brown Girl, Brownstones} (1959) which chronicles a Barbadian family’s immigrant experience in Brooklyn, New York.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{9} May 2.
\textsuperscript{10} Ten miles east of Kingston.
\textsuperscript{11} This female pastor has since gained national attention as she addresses schools and churches throughout the island, in an attempt to correct the “false information [about “love, sex and marriage” that] . . . persons have been fed . . . from the non-Christian world” (Dawes, 2007).
\textsuperscript{12} Outlook Magazine, September 3, 2006.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid, September 24, 2006.
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CHAPTER IV

RESPONDENTS DISCUSS MIGRATION AND MARRIAGE

A lot of other families have the same kind of pattern, something that is practiced as an option. It is natural, there is a pragmatic fidelity factor there, a recognition that you are committed. For both of us, it has been a wonderful exchange, has its own magic, its own way of being. We have supported each other in intrinsic ways; we have helped people in Jamaica and abroad.

—A left-behind husband

I worked full time and went to school full time. I used to send money all the time. He wanted me to come back home but I divorced him. He didn’t even know. If he knew, he probably wouldn’t have signed the papers, but he didn’t have to. He had a woman, in broad daylight. His sister told me.

—An immigrant wife

My parents should be divorced—I don’t know what the hell they’re waiting on! They’re no longer married. Coming to America has changed my Mom for the better. In Jamaica she was a housewife, home all the time. Now she works, she doesn’t take crap from people; she’s a tad stronger. I would like to see her a little stronger still, when necessary. I blame my grandmother. My father grew up thinking he had to take care of his parents. When you’re married, your mother should come second to your wife and kids.

—An adult daughter in the United States

People need to be together. I wouldn’t repeat my parents’ action. If my wife leaves, it can’t be for a long time. I would go to join her.

—An adult son in Jamaica

Foreword

The life story method I chose to examine how Jamaican couples live for years transnationally between Jamaica and the United States, seemingly without seeking a divorce, revealed internal differentiations between respondents, as might be expected. Although some ideas and feelings were held in common, each life story held some particularity of interest. When I interviewed both spouses in a marriage, for example, they did not differ as to events in the marriage, but rather in their reactions to, and perceptions of, those events. As Behar (1990, 233) states, “[l]ife histories [have] rigor and intensity because they do not claim ungendered point-of-
viewlessness.” To increase anonymity so that an individual life story is not recognizable throughout, I did not assign code names to respondents.

The chapter begins with an overall summary of the responses of each group, followed by a discussion of themes as foreseen in the questionnaire guides: marriage goals and the migration decision; marital satisfaction, pre- and post-migration; living apart and the passage of time; fidelity, sexuality, and extramarital relationships; reflections on marriage and divorce; and childhood socialization. Two other themes, respect and religion, not foreseen in the questionnaire, are also presented because they emerged from the responses. The chapter concludes with respondents’ plans for the future.

Respondents

The Wives

Surprisingly, the wives who seemed most satisfied were the few who had returned home to Jamaica to rejoin left-behind husbands. As the wife who seemed most content declared, “I am so happy and at peace. I am content with life; I have no regrets. There was no estrangement because we were doing it for a cause.” She decided to go home at age 50; “the death of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s daughter at age 50 confirmed” that it was time to go back home. The wife who seemed unhappiest was also the youngest–48 years old. Married for 21 years, she has been living in the United States for just over 10 years. She continues to work for “the dollars” in homecare but she really wants to go home to Jamaica, to be reunited with her husband, with whom she is “very much in love.” The fact that her husband “cheated on” her in 2013, a “hard year that needed a lot of prayer,” makes her even more anxious to return to him because “he misses” her and “he is a good man.”
On the spectrum between the happiest and unhappiest, some wives felt that husbands did not appreciate the extent of their sacrifice, how hard they had to work, for example, or how difficult it had been to raise children in the United States on their own. Some wives seemed “stuck” because of their reluctance to return to undesirable economic and social conditions in Jamaica. They were definite about not returning to the unequal conditions of marriage there. Some wives believe that they have in essence lost their marriage, but the nearness of children and grandchildren is their consolation. Divorce, however, was still not an option unless they wanted to remarry, as one wife did. The wife who divorced her husband subsequent to our interview felt impelled to sever all ties, especially financial ones with her husband. She thought he had mismanaged her remittances. Any regret expressed by wives was not for migrating but rather for marrying the husbands that they did.

The Husbands

One husband’s experience seemed typical of husbands who had emigrated then returned home:

“I migrated officially over 20 years ago to New York. I have a better time in Jamaica, where I am a first-class citizen. The weather is good; I am independent; and, most important, I am a first-class citizen. I consider my life a success; I have enjoyed it.”1

Another husband declared, “I returned from England because of the climate. I don’t intend to leave Jamaica again. I can get everything here. I get my English pension over here.” The one husband who was still angry and upset 31 years after migration ended his marriage, was living in the United States, and that seemed to make all the difference. At one end of the husband spectrum was the grounds man at the school in Jamaica where I taught, who was anxious to be

1 Quotation marks are used with interviewees’ responses because sometimes multiple respondents are quoted together.
back with his wife but not unhappy since he was satisfied that they were both doing their best for their family. He implied\(^2\) that his wife was in the United States illegally and he had been unable to obtain a visitor visa,\(^3\) so they had not seen each other for some time. At the other end of the spectrum was the husband who has been living apart from his wife for more than 30 years—he is now 71; she is 65. His wife is American and spent the first years of their marriage with him in Jamaica but returned to the United States when her mother became ill. Her mother has since passed on, but her father now needs her as he just celebrated his 100\(^{th}\) birthday. His wife would like him to come to live in the United States permanently, but he visits, from October to January each year, because of what he terms the “patriotic element.” He is doing important work for his church and the government in Jamaica and his wife understands that.

**The Adult Children**

Responses from adult children were not gendered, but varied with age and with how much of their childhood these young adults had spent in Jamaica and the United States. Older adult children tended to take a philosophical approach: their parents had done the best they could under the circumstances. Migration had been the correct decision, especially if the marriage had not been happy in Jamaica in the first place. One daughter described how sad she had been to see how badly her father had treated her mother and how unhappy her mother had been: “He was a horrible person as a husband and as a father.” She was happy that her mother had emigrated to effect a real, even though informal, separation. Younger adult children thought their parents’ marriage a waste and a sham, as indicated in the two quotes at the beginning of this chapter. A 28-year-old daughter declared, “It’s not really a marriage. You need to be around each other—

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\(^2\) Illegal status is not discussed, for obvious reasons.

\(^3\) As mentioned in Chapter II, a certain income level and other requirements are necessary to qualify for a visitor visa.
aspects of personality change. Getting back together, they will be strangers.” A son of the same age could not understand why his parents had not divorced:

“They are both happier the way they are. They don’t talk to each other; one can’t stand the other. If two people are not happy together, they should be able to go their amicable ways. I think they should divorce, absolutely! Then they could both be happy; at least one would be happier, Moms. My Dad is happy where he is. He wanted to stay in Jamaica with his parents. I don’t like change myself, so I can understand he wouldn’t like change either.”

Most parents thought their marriages may have disappointed their children. Two wives and a husband thought their children may even have been negatively affected. Surprisingly, however, none of the adult children interviewed admitted any adverse effects from their parents’ marriage. One older daughter, in a 10-year live-in relationship, declared that she is “scared of taking that step” but she did not blame her parents for her fears. Having come to the United States at the age of 17, she has probably been in the United States the longest of the adult children interviewed. This was a telephone interview so I was unable to assess her body language, but she was very open and spoke to me at length. Physically unable to have children, she expresses no regret because “it is hard to raise kids today;” a financial planner for the past 29 years, she has “put things in place” for herself. Since children and finances are not a factor, therefore, marriage would add only the title, “Mrs.” to her name and this title does not bear the same status in the United States that it does in Jamaica. Speaking on behalf of her ailing mother, she declared that her mother “has no regrets. This is how mothers are, they put the family first; they are caregivers to the end.” Her father “had a business running in Jamaica—he was his business”—and for him to live in the United States would be to “suck salt.” When her parents came to the United States, her mother was in her 50s and her father in his 60s. The transition was difficult for both, but “women are different, nurturers, will do whatever they can for the family.” Her father has since passed on, and her mother continues to live with her in the United States.
Most important, all adult children were grateful for the opportunities afforded them by their mothers’ migration, especially with regard to tertiary education. Only one older adult child expressed the wish that her mother had never emigrated, as she would have stayed in Jamaica, which she thinks she would have preferred.

**The Other Man**

She was in the United States without her husband; he was in the United States without his wife. They had a relationship and she became pregnant. When her left-behind husband joined her in the United States, her marriage continued, with the proviso that the child would be raised as his and would never know his real father. The other man later rejoined his wife and they had a happy life in England with a large family of children. He had always wondered, however, about this outside child, whom he knew to be a son, and was filled with regret that they had never met. At the time of the interview, he was back in Jamaica enjoying retirement with his wife.\(^4\)

**The Other Women**

Both women interviewed declared that they had not set out to have a relationship with a married man—it just happened that way. They had been discreet and completely respectful of the wife’s position. The first was a teacher colleague of mine who said she would even prepare Jamaican food, for example, fried fish, for the husband to send to his wife in the United States when friends were traveling. The second was the wife mentioned by the other man above—she had occupied both roles of immigrant wife and other woman in the United States. She had her jaw broken by her husband when he arrived in the United States to find her pregnant by another man. After this violent response, her husband ‘forgave’ her, forbidding her to let her son meet his

\(^4\) He subsequently passed on, without ever meeting his son.
real father. Her husband passed on while her son was still in school, and for years she wrestled with the decision as to when and how to tell the story to her son.

Finally, when her son got married and was en route to Jamaica for his honeymoon, she called and told him to be sure to visit “a friend of the family, Mr. Brown,” not adding that this man was his father. She was disappointed when the honeymoon passed without the young man making the visit and when he returned, she told him that Mr. Brown was his father. Her son was very upset because he claimed that the man he grew up thinking was his father had always treated him more harshly than his siblings, and he had somehow thought it was his fault for being the youngest. He never visited Mr. Brown in Jamaica, who passed on without ever meeting him.

The Left-Behind Adult Son

His mother went to England when he was four years old, leaving him in the care of his grand-aunt in a country village in Jamaica and his father in Kingston. As he put it, “She provided material support for me, but the breast was missing.” He did not see his mother again until he was 18, in Brooklyn when he migrated to the United States. He was happy that he managed to develop a relationship with her toward the end of her life, when he would read the Bible to her in the nursing home. He looks back at his left-behind experience as a “positive” one because he was indeed “raised by the village.” His teachers all took special interest in him, and he credits them for his success.

Interestingly, he was more concerned about being a “bastard” child because his parents had not married than about his mother leaving him behind. Even so, this concern “didn’t bother” him at all in Jamaica. It “did a job on” him when he entered Wall Street and the corporate world.

5 Not his real name.
Self-help therapy helped him “get rid of the anger” only about 10 years ago, especially “reading Rick Warren’s *Purpose Driven Life*, which pointed out that Jesus too was born out of wedlock.”

**Other Related Respondents**

The daughter of an other woman, another teacher colleague of mine, shared this story. When her father returned from England to Jamaica, his wife did not join him in Jamaica for another 19 years, during which she and two other children were born to the other woman. Her mother did not live with her father and, by the time his wife returned to Jamaica, their visiting relationship was over. My colleague actually moved in with her father and stepmother for a while, as “there were more resources” in that household. Her stepmother’s daughter is 19 years older and at first their relationship was distant, but she “has come around,” and now they get along well.

“One big happy family,” they have a reunion every year in Jamaica for a week, including an island tour, a formal dinner and a “bashment” (big party)–“it’s all about the children.” Her mother and stepmother decided that “life is too short to get upset.” There is also a second other woman in this story. “Fortunately,” this one had no children, as they all think “she was only in it for what she could get.” My colleague did not care at all for this other woman, who had unfairly, in her opinion, received a house from her father. In my colleague’s opinion, the Jamaican attitude to marriage is “part-British, part-African: British, in that we keep up appearances, don’t wash our dirty linen in public, bear misfortunes with a stiff upper lip; African, in that our men are polygamous.” The British part explained why her parents refused to be interviewed.

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6 Bauer and Thompson (2006, 194) share a similar story of three women and a man.
Sad stories are constantly told in Jamaica of left-behind husbands passing away in Jamaica and wives returning from abroad to “put out” the other woman and her children, sell the husband’s property, and leave again for the United States, without the other woman receiving any part of the husband’s fortune, or even any recognition, for her years of devotion. One such story by a related respondent concerned her friend, an other woman who made a family with a left-behind husband in Jamaica for some 20 years, while his emigrant wife and daughter lived in the United States. When he passed on, the adult daughters of about the same age exchanged heated words at his funeral because the daughter of the marriage insulted the other daughter and her mother.

This event occurred the year before my return to Jamaica and sure enough, as customary, the following three memorials appeared on the anniversary of the man’s passing in different areas of the same “Deaths and Memorials” page of The Gleaner. From the wife and family, there were two large, costly, entries:

“In Loving Memory of John Smith... Sadly missed by your loving wife Mary Smith, daughters Joan, Brenda, and Sue, sons John, Jr., and Joe, six grandchildren, other relatives and friends.”

“In Loving Memory of Our Dear Loved One, John Smith. You will always be remembered by Wife, children, grandchildren, mother, sisters, brothers, nieces, other relatives and friends.”

From the other woman, Winsome and family, the entry was the usual smaller size:

“In loving memory of a dear loved one, father and friend... Gone too soon! Lovingly remembered by Winsome, Carol and Evon.”

Interestingly, both carried a photograph of the gentleman in question, so friends and relatives would be quite privy to the whole affair.

Marriage Goals and the Migration Decision

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7 Names and other identifying elements changed, for confidentiality. The quotes are otherwise exact.
Marriage goals were not gendered. They went from “none,” stated by a wife and a husband from two different families, to long lists:

“to have children born in wedlock; for financial security; to rear children in solid home environment; for greater respectability; for greater sharing and togetherness; two persons can live cheaper than a single individual” (one husband);

“to work, put money together, get house in Jamaica sorted out, car, washing machine and return to my job and comfy life, without having to pay a mortgage” (one wife).

Responses differed as to migration’s contribution to the achievement of these goals. One wife declared that she had not “achieved the happiness and strength of cash goals” for which she had emigrated. Most wives seemed to imply that goal achievement had proved more difficult, certainly more time-consuming, than they had expected, for a variety of reasons, some more structural than personal:

“I came on the Live-In Program by which you could get sponsored for a Green Card. After three years, they let me go; I had to go home to get a visa. I came just to make some dollars to send the kids to college. I was seven years without papers. Amnesty spoiled it, as the program was put on the back burner.”

Unlike the Mexican immigrants Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) describes, the migration decision for the wife to leave and the husband to stay behind at least initially was usually made jointly, as mentioned above. Only in one case did a husband, as head of household, unilaterally make both decisions, and that couple’s socioeconomic status (SES) was probably higher than that of the other interviewees and their stated reason for migration was not economic, but “political instability.” In most cases, the wife’s stay abroad was envisaged to be short-term, “about five years.” One wife’s boss in Jamaica even kept her position waiting for some time because she “never told him formally that [she] wouldn’t be returning.” Most wives wanted their husbands to join them in the United States at some point so they might “work together, and achieve.” One wife, however, spoke of escaping a “hostile atmosphere” in Jamaica: “I did not
want him to migrate with me, no way! I wanted freedom to be me. I was happy with him living away, until he got sick.”

Spouses did not regret their migration decision. Many wives had achieved, or were achieving, their goals, and their husbands left behind in Jamaica spoke of them with pride, particularly in terms of children’s education. For example:

“It was a necessary situation for her to migrate. Both boys were in college; you work with it, though it’s not ideal;”

“I am happy that my wife migrated. I had been exposed to different cultures and the benefits of foreign travel when I lived overseas. Therefore when I encouraged and influenced my wife to join me in the U.S., I was extremely happy when she accepted my invitation. Unfortunately, I was on study leave in the U.S. and it was obligatory for me to return to Jamaica at the end of my study leave. Furthermore, serious consideration had to be given to my retirement benefits which would become due in another seven years.”

The wife who thought her relationship might be over was sad, but not regretful of her decision to emigrate:

“I don’t regret the initial move—to help my daughter, who has now obtained her Master’s degree. I put my children before my husband, I love them more. He was the perfect father—still is. You don’t love someone when you meet them—you grow to love them. Therefore you make a decision to love someone. How can he just decide not to love me anymore?”

Her admission to loving her children more than her husband was revealing, also her idea that love needed to grow, an event that would be difficult in a transnational setting. Some spouses looked back at the decision with a degree of ambivalence. One husband was quite unsure:

“Am I happy that my wife migrated? That is difficult to answer. Married people should be together—there were ups and downs before she went away. There was talk of separation—we missed each other. The decision for her to go was mutual. I was never interested and I’m still not. I love where I am.”

**Marital Satisfaction, Pre- and Post-Migration**
Here again responses fell on a spectrum, from wives who used migration to effect a real separation because of pre-migration problems—“the [other] women never stopped, the [outside] children never stopped;” “I complained, but no one listened;” “I was glad to get away, I was angry, he never took up for me”–to the wife just quoted who was “angry, upset, depressed” because her husband had just told her, post her emigration, that he did not “feel the same way about her as before.” One wife’s problem was the same pre- and post-migration: her husband’s overriding concern for his mother. Clarke (1957, 124) described an “exclusive, and often obsessive, mother-son relationship . . . the son’s dependence upon [the mother] . . . in adolescence and beyond.” This is still a topic of contention in Jamaican culture today, that men revere their mothers and ill-treat their wives. Stone (2007, 31-34), for example, reports how her ill husband’s mother would not stop calling and “depleted [her] of energy and enthusiasm.” My respondent’s mother-in-law has now passed on, but her husband remains in Jamaica. True, his father is still alive, but he has another brother who lives in Jamaica with his family, so his wife does not accept this as an excuse for his refusal to emigrate.

On a scale of 1 to 10, most respondents (male and female) rated their overall marital satisfaction from 6 to 8. Wives reported that their sexual satisfaction had fallen after living apart for a long time. Some wives stated that this reflected a concern for their sexual health since they did not trust that their husbands had been faithful in their time apart. One wife who rated her current satisfaction at only 2 stated that pre-migration it was no better: “My sexual satisfaction wasn’t important; I can’t rate my satisfaction ‘cause I don’t remember.” However, as long as they were living in Jamaica, in good health, and divorce was not imminent, husbands reported that they were satisfied with the relationships with their wives. An older upper middle-class husband seemed quite content with his situation:
“Why don’t I ask my wife to stay with me? That’s a tricky question. . . . My wife is an independent woman, she has enough money there, she can live well on the interest, so her life must be more pleasant than that of other emigrant women who are not as privileged. I have lived and I am therefore happy. Let death come when it will!”

Another husband’s “least satisfying year” was the year he “was about to retire and [his] wife gave no indication that she wanted to return to Jamaica to reside.” As happened, he joined her in the United States, but she soon divorced him; he continues to reside, somewhat unhappily, in the United States. Wives tended to assign any changes in their behavior toward their husbands “not so much from being in America as from maturity” (partly because they were already familiar with, and influenced by, U.S. society before they migrated), and from the length of time apart. Husbands and adult children tended to disagree with this assessment of the situation, convinced that the more “woman-friendly” American society had made wives “more independent,” “stronger,” assertive, even aggressive.

**Living Apart and the Passage of Time**

Wives and husbands were in constant communication by mail (especially cards for special occasions) and telephone. One wife stated, “We use Facetime and Skype every morning and night,” while a husband declared,

“It feels like my wife and I are in one bedroom, just that the walls are further apart, because of how often we call, see each other, travel together.”

Even though some wives were earning more than their husbands, they still considered their husbands the head of their households and would call “home” to Jamaica to consult them before making important decisions, especially with regard to the children. Remittances were not unidirectional--some husbands contributed financially to children’s education or sent their wives airline tickets to come home to visit.
Most couples saw each other at least once a year, generally for two to six weeks, either in Jamaica or the United States. One wife accumulated her days off so she could return to her husband in Jamaica every three months for five days; one husband visited his wife in the United States also every three months, for two weeks at a time. Visits were greatly facilitated by the relatively short distance between Jamaica and the United States and the availability of special airfares sporadically during the year. However, lack of visas or the right immigration status was sometimes a huge deterrent. Two wives came to the United States on visitor visas and overstayed: they had to wait several years for their status to be regularized. In both cases their permanent resident visas (green cards) came through sponsorship of the employer for whose children they were caring.

Husbands described special preparations, for example, the “lavish meal” wives would make to welcome them to the United States and how they would return the favor, ensuring that “floors of the house were properly scrubbed and polished” when wives visited them in Jamaica. One husband who visits the United States each year from June to September joyfully reminisced, “Typically my visit is lovely. My wife always comes to the airport to meet me. She treats me lovely. Money on the table, sometimes $2,000, for me to go shopping.” One wife, however, complained that her husband’s visits had become less frequent and less pleasant with the passage of time:

“At first he would come three times a year to see the children; now he comes once every five years, for four days. He doesn’t welcome me when I visit, he only looks for sex. He sleeps in the living room when he comes; we haven’t had sex in seven years. We used to communicate by phone calls—we no longer talk.”

Another wife described a similar experience:

“The first three years, I thought it was going well. The last three years have been disappointing. After striving so long, dreams don’t work out. When we started
living apart, I thought it was temporary—I hoped we would see each other three or four times a year—very temporary, maybe five years and I would go back home.”

All husbands claimed to miss their wives, especially initially. They enjoyed living in Jamaica, however, where life was easier, simpler. People knew them, they felt connected. Big cities like New York and Miami had an anonymity that Kingston would never have. (Ironically, wives liked that aspect of the big cities in the United States—they felt freer to be themselves, without being “talked about.”) The few husbands who did not employ domestic helpers did not seem to mind cooking and cleaning for themselves. Of the older husbands aged 76, 84, and 71, respectively, the first kept declaring that he was fine but seemed a little sad, probably because his health was failing; the second said he was fine and looked the part; and the third claimed to be perfectly content but, since he was interviewed by phone, I could not deny or confirm this from seeing him.

Wives enjoyed the authority of running their own show in the United States: “This is my house now!” They missed their husbands, but not the housework which used to be their sole domain: “I’m not going back home to cook, clean, and take care of the house—that is over with!” They were happy for the opportunity to self-actualize for a change: “He has all the degrees; I was busy taking care of him and the children.”

**Fidelity, Sexuality, and Extramarital Relationships**

The question, “Have you been faithful to your marriage vows?” received the quickest response. Immigrant wives usually replied in the affirmative: “I have never given even a thought to being unfaithful, all these years. Once a taximan was trying, I stopped taking his taxi!” Left-behind husbands usually replied in the negative, adding comments like, “Now and then I have a woman on the side,” or “Don’t I look handsome to you? I don’t look [for] women; women look me!” One husband declared that his wife would call him every Friday night “to keep the noose
around the neck,” but that he would go dancing immediately afterwards. Sometimes he would even have an other woman at home with him when she called. A particularly engaging octogenarian implied that he could not be expected to be faithful to a wife who was absent when women were such an important part of his life:

“Women are the sweetest thing on earth to a man. There is nothing sweeter than sex. The most important things in life are money and women. Women are too naïve to admit they feel the same way.”

One husband stated that his sexuality “had not been a problem” because his work had involved long hours and he had had many friends with whom to socialize. Another husband skirted the question completely by declaring that “when a man marries, that’s when he meets all the women he wanted to meet years ago, so the poor man has to resist temptation.”

The Jamaican double standard of morality was reflected in the fact that all the husbands, even the unfaithful ones, were certain that their absent wives would never be unfaithful to them. One declared, “I could put my head on the block that she is faithful, I have 100 percent confidence in her.” Of course the unfaithful husbands were just as certain that their wives would be “most upset” to find out that they had been unfaithful. They confessed outright to upholding the double standard:

“Sex is wonderful! I love it. I had an absolutely satisfying sexual relationship with my wife in Jamaica. I missed her sexually when she left. When we were apart, unfortunately, I had a girlfriend. It’s purely speculative, but I think she had a boyfriend. During the latter part of our marriage, sex was not only infrequent, but perfunctory. I have not been faithful to my marriage vows; I succumbed to the pressures to loneliness. I am upset at the thought of her being unfaithful, it’s a natural human response/reaction. My wife would be terribly upset if she found out that I had been unfaithful.”

Another husband explained the double standard as a result of “male dominance:”

“Marriage is not a deterrent to extramarital affairs, hence the reason for so many children being born out of wedlock each year. Jamaican men tend to view marriage as an institution that promotes male dominance and therefore women are
not seen as equal partners in the relationship. The subservient role that women play in marriage makes them only valued for their sexuality.”

Sadly, the husband who declared,

“I don’t know how I would react if I found out that my wife has been unfaithful; sufficient unto the time is the evil thereof. She would be most upset if she found out that I had been unfaithful. She would be devastated. She would want an immediate divorce, sale of property and division of proceeds from sale of property”

was indeed later (after the interview) divorced by his wife, who claimed that “a lot of things came to light that [she] did not know before.”

Contrary to their left-behind husbands’ predictions, immigrant wives generally hoped that husbands would be faithful to their marriage vows but doubted they would be. One wife declared:

“I have no idea what my husband does about his sexuality, and I don’t want to know. On a scale of 1 to 10, my sexual satisfaction with my husband was 8 to 9 in JA; 0 now. I have no idea whose fault this is; I don’t think he is interested in me. I have been faithful to my marriage vows, in every possible way. I don’t think he has been faithful to his; I’m not upset, just disappointed.”

Another wife who expressed confidence that her husband had been faithful also declared, “I would not be upset if he hadn’t; he would have been greatly upset if I hadn’t.” Immigrant wives admitted to missing their husbands sexually, especially at the beginning, but claimed to sublimate these feelings by working harder:

“I don’t do anything about my sexuality because I am too busy!”

“Sex is necessary, but I forget about it;”

“Both men and women can live without sex, if they want to.”

As noted above, only one wife admitted that she had been unfaithful: “He has not been faithful; I have not been faithful. I don’t know if he’s upset. I told him; he didn’t react.”
Indeed, immigrant wives were usually willing to forgive their left-behind husbands to a point, though it was not specified what that point would be, especially when their husbands were perceived to be equally “hardworking” and “ambitious.” Two unforgivable conditions did, however, emerge from the interviews. First, a left-behind husband should never take an other woman into the marital home, as this was considered the height of disrespect.\(^8\)

“He brought a woman into my house, disrespectful! I’m up here working like a dog, and he’s going to want to play his games? I prefer to be lonely than to live a dirty life!”

Attempting to hide such an indiscretion was usually futile, as communities were small and the “grapevine” active: “His sister told me;” “Him tek me for a flippin’ fool!” Second, a left-behind husband should not spend his immigrant wife’s hard-earned cash on an other woman, especially when his wife was “working two or three jobs” abroad.

Wives’ typical reaction to husbands’ infidelity was to withdraw from sexual intimacy, as a kind of punishment but also for fear of disease. One wife, however, was still angry and refusing years later to “forgive and forget” her husband’s sole indiscretion. The Jamaican double moral standard was clearly an issue for her:

“I have been faithful to my vows; my husband has not. I was very upset when I found out because I believed he had many faults but that was not one of them. I was upset at the betrayal of trust, and that concern over how I would feel about it did not deter or affect him. If he found out that I had been unfaithful, he would probably be upset, but having been unfaithful himself, he might have to display some tolerance/understanding, but it’s hard to say. If I had to do it all over again, I would like to be able to trust him.”

Another wife who had divorced her Jamaican husband and married an American declared,

“I wouldn’t marry another Jamaican if he was the last man in the world. They are married, but they are dogs. They always have another woman. The other woman is so bright,\(^9\) she even calls the wife’s house. She has no respect for the wife or children. I know my [current] husband would never cheat on me. We are very

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\(^8\) This may be seen as a process of setting boundaries, see Epstein 1992.

\(^9\) Jamaican for “bold, brazen.”
serious about our vows, we have to make the children see a good life; they will imitate what they see.”

Husbands’ reaction to wives’ infidelity could be most extreme: the wife mentioned earlier in this chapter who had a child by an “other man” was “forgiven” by her husband, but only after he had broken her jaw; another husband who had been a policeman in Jamaica almost killed his wife when, on arriving in the United States, he merely suspected her of infidelity. Fortunately, his teenage daughter managed to persuade him to get rid of his gun.

Reflections on Marriage and Divorce

All spouses agreed that marriage was “a great institution.” Wives admired husbands who were faithful and good providers: “women should cater to men as homemakers; men should go out and work.” The immigrant wife who divorced her left-behind Jamaican husband and is now married to an American declared with pride:

“My second husband has made provision for me; nobody will have to be sorry for me, not even my children. He told me that, when he dies, I will have more money than when he was alive.”

Even wives who had been disillusioned declared that they would marry again, but to someone “kinder, more caring.” There was, however, ample criticism of how people from Jamaica and the Caribbean practiced marriage:

“In the Caribbean, the belief is that women should cook for their men, who in turn should work and provide financially for the family. In my case, my husband was supposed to get a house. I was staying for a while until he got it, it wasn’t planned this way. A lot of Jamaican men don’t believe in getting married; women do, but men don’t.”

“In Jamaica, sex and money are greatly prioritized. Jamaicans see marriage as a business. They live together instead of getting married because it is easier to jump ship. It is a trial period. Some couples live together for a long time and then get married, because the trial period gives them the fortitude to take their chance.”

“People don’t honor their vows anymore.”
“Marriage is a business, for example, to go to America, for both men and women, not love or affection, but what one can get out of marriage. Moreover, once you get married, the woman’s attitude always changes, it gets worse, she doesn’t care, she lets herself go.”

One husband regretted marrying late:

“In retrospect, I would try to get married between the ages of 20 and 24. That gives you several opportunities to be divorced and remarry. Life is short, therefore it would give added opportunity to follow the professional careers of the children and have the good fortune of intermingling with the grandchildren. All men should endeavor to get married at least once in life.”

All spouses, wives and husbands, agreed that divorce was an absolute last resort, “after all else has failed.” The most embittered husband in this study remained separated for 20 years before finally filing for divorce.

Despite the fact that some wives were visibly upset and some adult children thought their parents’ marriages a sham, the transnational marriages continued. Couples did not consider the living-apart experience in itself grounds for legal separation or divorce: there had to be some intervening factor. For example, when a wife returned to her work abroad, leaving her husband ill in the hospital, he claims that he never re-committed to the marriage. His wife has since returned to Jamaica, where they both now live, but separately. Another husband remains surprised that his wife has divorced him. He arrived in the United States to enjoy retirement with her, only to be informed that the marriage had been over “years ago.” His surprise is no surprise to her, since:

“I tried to tell him, but he didn’t believe me. Men take women so much for granted. It’s partly our fault—we say things in anger, then go back on our word. I’ll bawl my eyes out and he’ll do the same thing all over again.”

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10 This husband was ambivalent toward divorce as elsewhere in his interview and questionnaire he stated that divorce should be a last resort.
All spouses agreed that “divorce is better than an intolerable marriage,” but the term “intolerable” was subject to interpretation. A husband, although married to a woman who lives in the United States, has not divorced his wife in England:  

“I’m not divorced from my wife in England–me and her don’t have anything. We still have a good relationship, no animosity. She doesn’t mind getting/giving a divorce, but the legal costs. She returned to England (she’s English) because of animosity in Jamaica toward the children, in 1969. Divorce is the most difficult thing, although we are separated for almost 40 years, because we get along so nicely and divorce is such a final breakaway. I think my wife agrees with me, or she would have divorced me long ago.”

A wife declared:

“I feel you must divorce once the marriage isn’t working. Because he’s not living with me, I haven’t filed for divorce. I would have, if he was living with me. I consider myself divorced. I don’t know how my husband views divorce. Jamaicans are very ashamed when they have to divorce; they have too much pride, they don’t want anyone to know their marriage didn’t work.”

Another husband lamented the decline in marriage and frequency of divorce in the Western world and increasingly in Jamaica:

“In the Americas and Europe, the excitement of marriage continues. However, my observation is that many couples in the Western World today don’t seem too bothered about the section of the marriage vows which says, “Till death do us part.” Instead, many Jamaicans say, “Until there is a reason to go our separate ways again.” I have no statistical evidence to support my view, but I am of the opinion, based on the number of weddings to which I get invited these days, the number of weddings I observe taking place in the rural community in which I reside, the discussions I listen to in bars and other public places, that the number of persons getting married yearly has declined. It would seem that many more Jamaicans are getting into common-law relationships and, at the same time, more and more marriages are breaking up.”

If indeed divorce was the answer, the spouses in this study agreed that it should take place only after the children were grown and gone. One husband (who, ironically, had been unfaithful to his

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11 No doubt the distance between England and Jamaica has shielded him from being accused of bigamy.

12 Jamaican for “she and I have not quarreled.”
wife) summed up the general feeling of these transnational spouses concerning marriage and divorce:

“Each party brings different expectations into a marriage, hence the reason to have long counseling sessions with your [religious] Minister prior to marriage. Couples should try to solve their difficulties, instead of going to third parties (mothers- and fathers-in-law, for example). If the couple is having problems, they should seek a whole heap of professional help before going the divorce route.”

**Childhood Socialization**

An older wife, who identified herself as “American, not Jamaican,” complained that when she was growing up in Jamaica “they made life harder . . . than they had to; they were over-strict with everything.” Another wife, who worked two jobs but would still prepare the next day’s meals for her visiting left-behind husband when she arrived home late at night, stated matter-of-factly, without complaining,

“It’s not that my husband doesn’t cook; my upbringing says that I should make meals for my husband and I still do. I don’t think he can make meals the way I think he should.”

Wives had been socialized as girls to believe, as one wife reported, that “women should cook for their men, who in turn should work and provide financially for the family.” They should “cater to their husbands, prepare their meals and place them on the table in front of them.” The husband who expressed regret that he had married late said that his father had instilled in him the need to first “own the roof over his head” before “taking a wife.”

Most spouses claimed to have witnessed, and wanted to emulate, their parents’ long marriages “until death parted them” which, although in most cases short on public displays of affection (PDA), nevertheless expressed “deep caring.” All spouses claimed to have been socialized against considering divorce a ready solution for problems:

“It’s not that I don’t believe in divorce, but it’s not a frivolous thing. If there is no way out, don’t sit in a situation, but it’s not the first option. It’s the way I was
raised, my Christian beliefs. My husband doesn’t believe in divorce, his religion
doesn’t. The average Jamaican thinks like me about divorce.”

Surprisingly, one wife stated, “I think I acquired a good attitude to sex from my
childhood. There is no gap between what I learned in childhood and what I ended up doing.”

Many wives claimed they had acted differently from the dictates of their socialization. One wife
said that what she learned in childhood “was too difficult to follow.” Another wife echoed this
reflection:

“There is a big gap between what I learned in childhood and what I ended up
doing. Times have changed. My parents were very private; we are less so and we
should be. We should be open with our affection. I am very affectionate. I am not
changed but my eyes have been opened to life, not so much from being in
America as from maturity. Life is short and you should enjoy it. You don’t know
what tomorrow will bring.”

Respect

For wives, the key word was “respect,” with equality and companionship a close second.

“Disrespect: he never respected me;”

“If I had to do it again, I would like my marriage to be based on respect,
friendship and godliness;”

“Closeness of two people together is important—companionship and sharing; treat
me right and I’ll treat you right.”

The wife who eventually divorced her husband spoke at length about his lack of respect:

“In retrospect, I would not get married, nor would I have continued to live
together with him. I believe in marriage, but it has to be a partnership thing, half
and half, each respecting the other. It didn’t happen that way. I tried to respect
him in every way—I’m not saying that I respected him all the time. Some things I
knew but willed myself not to believe. He has no respect for me, none
whatsoever. I look back and realize that, from things that happened, there was no
respect and respect is important. I don’t believe in the old time days of taking care
without respect; that’s no good. No, it’s very important that one should have a
feeling of self-worth.”
Surprisingly, the only wife who mentioned the respect given to the title of “Mrs.” dismissed it as unimportant, probably because she was no longer living in Jamaica but in the United States.

Husbands also used the word “respect” in their responses, but not in a uniform way. Some were grateful for the “greater respectability” and “better financial security (greater control over excessive spending)” that marriage had provided, whereas the husband who claimed that he had kept count of his many sexual partners had done so “out of respect.” Another husband seemed to take pride in having treated both his wife, now emigrant, and his other woman with “respect.”

“I had a good sweetheart, my secretary, who helped me run my business. She and my wife were both in the business. I was born poor. I bought a house for her, we tried to have children, but didn’t. The poor thing died early, in her 30s.”

Religion

Jamaican society is known to be religious—the popular saying is that there are more churches per square foot than anywhere else and that the church is usually around the corner from the “rum bar.” Interestingly, although the questionnaire did not query religion, all spouses seemed to regard marriage as a “sacred commitment” and some interviewees specifically included God and religion in their responses:

“29 years married, I want to renew vows; my husband doesn’t. I am a born-again Christian; I attend the New Testament Church of God; it’s not terribly strict. I mellowed into Christianity. My husband is a Methodist.”

“I put God in front; He helped me on.”

One wife met her husband in church; another credited prayer for helping her overcome her husband’s infidelity and asked me to pray for her to rejoin him soon. Another accepted the fact that she had not realized her goal of having more children as “God’s will.” Having given birth to two children before marriage, she would have liked to have borne children for her husband. The
wife who said her husband no longer loves her asked, “How can you say you love God when you haven’t seen Him, yet you don’t love your wife?” Yet another wife credited her “Catholic upbringing” for influencing her “attitude to sex.”

One husband met his wife at a church teacher’s college in the United States, and he continues to be very active in that church in Jamaica. The husband who was interviewed in his church provided the following explanation of his church’s stance on marriage and divorce:

“We want to follow the precepts of the church—marriage is supposed to be getting stronger, but why so much break-up? Compatibility, or were things concealed before marriage? There is a controversy in the church—you must put away your own pleasure on the Sabbath but, on the other hand, the Lord makes sex holy so, if you both agree, OK. Jamaicans get their ideas about marriage from tradition and the Bible. The Church does not condone divorce; if you are an officer, you can’t keep your office. It is up to your conscience. Marital counseling is available in the church.”

Another husband, in describing the effects of his Roman Catholic mother and Methodist father on his childhood socialization, claimed that “most social interactions with ‘John Public’ took place on Sundays with the congregation at church.” Another husband criticized the “antiquated, Puritanical moral attitudes and ideas” of his mother, “a staunch Catholic.” Ironically, his mother never married his father. The older husband who claimed “there is nothing sweeter than sex” was “Catholic by upbringing.” He described an encounter with a girl in his youth that he “often revisit[ed] in [his] mind”:

“I should have married her right away, shouldn’t I? I regret that I didn’t pursue it further, but I feel it is because of how I was socialized that I did not realize that the feeling was more real, more spiritual, than sex. I still don’t understand my reaction, but I feel I should have pursued it.”

Religion is discussed further with the analysis of these responses in Chapter V.

Plans for the Future

13 She completed a questionnaire and did not elaborate on what that attitude was.
The youngest wife interviewed, aged 48, is most anxious to go home to her husband from whom she has lived apart for just over 10 years, “I hope to go home for good in two to three years; he wants my help. The first floor of the house is finished; I can go home now.” She is working toward them owning their own bed and breakfast in Montego Bay. Her “very hard-working” husband already manages two tourist properties and is buying a bus for tourist transportation, so she sees them together as a formidable team. These Jamaican transnational spouses began life in a “tenement yard”¹⁴ in Jamaica; migration will enable them to achieve their goal of living in a gated community.

Many immigrant wives, however, having lived in the United States for many years, are reluctant to return to Jamaica, especially to be away from children and grandchildren. Moreover, even if they remain committed to their marriage, earning “the dollars” enables them to maintain a certain standard of living. On the other hand, a husband explained why he will not leave Jamaica to join his immigrant wife:

“Jamaica makes for a certain comfort level. People know you by sight, even if you’re not really friends. In America you don’t know anybody. Here you are free, to go out on the road.”

Another husband stated his dilemma:

“I don’t plan to join her in the U.S. If I have to, I will. I don’t know if I would like my wife to return to live with me in Jamaica. She definitely wants me to come and join her. Unfortunately for me, I’ll have to go up there, as my daughter is filing for me. I’d rather stay in Jamaica. Let’s just say, I’m patriotic.”

For wives who will not return to live in Jamaica and husbands who will not migrate to the United States, the future is, as one wife declared, “uncertain.” The wife who claimed that her husband no longer loves her stated:

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¹⁴ urbandominion.com definition: “Jamaican slang for a housing area that is generally poor or undeveloped.” Equivalent to “shanty town” or “ghetto.”
“I might be willing to go back home now—two kids are through school, the third is on his way in, he’s the only one left. But now this decision by my husband (unilateral, we haven’t discussed it, I’m telling you more than I told him) makes me mad.”

On the other hand, another wife who has been living apart for 15 years declared that she has no intention of ever resuming cohabitation with her husband, in either country:

“I don’t plan to return to Jamaica to live—if so, by myself. I don’t want him to come and live with me here—he’s on his own. I’m on the lookout for a new husband. I would marry again, a more caring man.”

CHAPTER V
THE THEMES THAT EMERGED

One must . . . draw up a theory of this non-theoretical, partial, somewhat down-to-earth relationship with the social world that is the relation of ordinary experience. And one must also establish a theory of the theoretical relationship, a theory of all the implications, starting with the breaking off of practical belonging and immediate investment, and its transformation into the distant, detached relationship that defines the scientist’s position.

—Bourdieu 1990

Data interpretation and analysis involve making sense out of what people have said, looking for patterns, putting together what is said in one place with what is said in another place, and integrating what different people have said.

—Patton 1980

Jamaican woman a sugar and salt
Some a dem a genal an wi make yu bawl
. . . .
Dem understand dem Jamaican man
But most of all dem ave ambition

—Fab 5 Band

Introduction

This chapter analyzes, against the background of participant observation, interviewees’ responses about how Jamaican transnational couples remain married while living apart for over a

15 My translation: “Jamaican women are both sweet and sour; some of them are tricky and will make you cry. They understand their Jamaican men, but most of all they have ambition.”
decade in Jamaica and the United States. The chapter opens with a synopsis of Lorna Goodison’s short story, “Bella Makes Life,” (1990) which, although Bella and Joseph live apart for only one year, provides a surprisingly accurate depiction of a Jamaican-American transnational marriage, especially of left-behind husband Joseph. Bella, Joseph and Miss Blossom could easily represent interviewees in this study: (1) the immigrant wife; (2) the left-behind husband; and (3) the other woman. Unlike the adult children in this study, the children in the story are still young—only a year has passed since their mother emigrated—and there is only the merest hint of an other man among Bella’s “friends” in New York.

The Fictional Story: “Bella Makes Life”

The story opens with immigrant wife Bella’s first visit back to Jamaica from New York, where she has gone “to work some dollars” so that she and her husband can “make life” for when she comes home. Joseph, nicknamed Joe Joe, has begun to “sense the change in Bella,” from the changed frequency and nature of her letters. She no longer writes often because she now has “two jobs.” Moreover, she is no longer pining for him:

I make friends with a girl on the job named Yvonne and sometimes she and I go with some other friends on a picnic or so up to Bear Mountain. I guess that’s where Peaches says she saw me. I figure I might as well enjoy myself while I not so old yet.

Joseph is quite unprepared, however, for “the new Bella” who arrives at the airport in Kingston:

He was embarrassed when he saw her coming toward him. He wished he could have disappeared into the crowd and kept going as far away from Norman Manley Airport as was possible. . . . What in God’s name was a big forty-odd-year-old woman who was fat when she leave Jamaica, and get worse fat since she go to America, what was this woman doing dressed like this? . . . Oh Bella what happen to you? Joseph never even bother take in her anklet and her big bracelets and her gold chain with a pendant, big as a name plate on a lawyer’s office, marked “Material Girl.”

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16 Cellphones are not yet in existence, nor do they have a phone at home.
17 The story is about Bella, but written from Joseph’s point of view, hence the Jamaican dialect (“patois”).
Bella also has a new “boldness” and “forwardness” in her public display of affection\(^\text{18}\) for Joseph and is louder than he remembers. Rather than stay home to cook and clean for him, as she used to do, Bella is now a self-motivated saleswoman, out all the time peddling the American goods that she has brought home to sell. When after only a month Bella decides to return to the United States because “America teach her that if you want it, you have to go for it,” Joseph is unbelieving. He is baffled as to what “it” means. As driver of his own income-earning taxi and owner of “a comfortable little two-bedroom house with a nice living-room, kitchen, bathroom and verandah,” Joseph thinks he has already “made it.” He is “fairly contented” and just wants his wife to come back home so that they can be “a family once more.”

In an early letter Bella pleads with Joseph to be faithful to her, while promising to be faithful herself:

> Please don’t have any other woman while I’m gone. I know that a man is different from a woman, but please do try and keep yourself to yourself till we meet and I’m saving all my love for you.

However, the other woman, unmarried Miss Blossom, the “nice, nice woman who live at the corner of the next road,” does indeed enter the picture while Bella is away. Joseph tries to “make sure that the two of them just remain social friends” and does not see Miss Blossom while Bella is visiting. It is only after Bella returns to New York after the first visit that the friendship with Miss Blossom begins to grow. As time passes and Joseph thinks of “life without Bella,” Miss Blossom begins “to look better and better to him.” Since Joseph has not introduced, or even mentioned, Miss Blossom to Bella, nor does he see her while Bella is visiting, Miss Blossom knows about Bella, but Bella knows nothing about Miss Blossom. Miss Blossom even tries to discuss Bella with Joseph:

> “So Bella really gone back a New York?”

\(^{18}\) Not a part of Jamaican culture, as mentioned by respondent in Chapter IV.
“Yes, mi dear, she say she got to make it while she can.”
“Make what?”
“It!”
“A wha it so?” [What does “it” mean?]
“You know . . . Oh forget it.”

Before long, Joseph is enjoying the dinner Miss Blossom sends for him and the children—“food taste different, taste more nourishing when a woman cook it.” He ignores friend-of-the-family Peaches’s warning, “Be careful of them stew peas and rice you a eat from that lady they you know, mine she want to tie¹⁹ you.”

A remark in Bella’s next letter—“I’m just trying to make it so that you and me and the children can live a better life and stop having to box feeding outta hog mouth”—pushes Joseph over the edge:

Now that really hurt Joe Joe. He would never describe their life together as that . . . True, sometimes things had been tight but they always had enough to eat and wear. Box feeding outta hog mouth . . . that was the lowest level of human existence and all these years he thought they were doing fine, that is how Bella saw their life together . . . well sir, Joe Joe was so vex that him never even bother to reply to that letter.

Movie dates with Miss Blossom ensue and “little by little the line of demarcation between social friends and sweetheart just blurred.” Joseph jealously orders Miss Blossom to stop seeing “the married man” who has been visiting her, who she claims “was only a social friend.” Miss Blossom is now effectively Joseph’s other woman, helping him to take care of the children and “is like they choose to forget Bella altogether.”

Bella decides to come home again, this time for Christmas. This news disturbs Joseph as he is “feeling quite contented,” even though “Miss Blossom couldn’t compare to Bella because Bella was the first woman [he] ever really love.” Miss Blossom is upset and wants Joseph to

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¹⁹ Refers to the Jamaican (and Afro-Caribbean) belief that a woman can prepare food in such a way as to make a man love her.
inform Bella that “absence makes the heart grow fonder . . . of someone else” or, as she says in true Jamaican style, “anything stay too long will serve two masters, or two mistresses as the case might be.” Joseph reminds Miss Blossom that Bella is his “baby mother” and “no matter what is the situation, respect is due,” to which Miss Blossom replies that “when Bella take up herself and gone to New York and leave him, she should know that respect was due to him too.” Although Joseph indicates that he will take care of things “in the right and proper way,” he is depressed by Miss Blossom’s threat that “she hope that when Bella gone again him don’t bother ask her fi nuttin [for nothing].”

When Bella arrives for her second visit, her appearance is even more outrageous and Joseph finds her stranger than before, so that Joseph begins to “wonder what she is doing in America, if she really is just waitressing at that club.” When she mentions “the age of women’s liberation,” Joseph has had enough. He responds harshly that “maybe she should liberate her backside outta him life” because he cannot tolerate her new attitude. Bella cries and tells Joseph how much she loves him and:

things became really intense and it was like a movie and they had to turn up the radio really high to prevent the children from hearing them.

The visit goes badly. Joseph is “really dying for Bella to leave” as he does not “much like the woman she has become.” This time the house is constantly full of Bella’s loud, Jamaican20 “posse” and Bella constantly reminds him and the children how much she has paid for everything. The crisis comes when Bella puts Jherri curls21 in both their daughter’s and son’s hair. Joseph explodes and they have a real quarrel. He tells her that America has “turned her into an idiot” and she accuses him of being “worthless, good-for-nuttin.” Bella returns to New

20 Term coined for Jamaicans who live in the United States.
21 Processed, “permed,” hairstyle popular in Black America in the 1970s and 1980s. Joseph was particularly angry about his son’s hair because it made him “look like a cocaine seller.”
York right after the New Year. Interestingly, Joseph does not mention Miss Blossom’s name to Bella, not even in his anger. He is happy when Bella returns to New York.

Joseph waits two weeks before he tries to see Miss Blossom again, probably from embarrassment because he has put her aside again during Bella’s visit. Miss Blossom’s home is empty, however, and nobody knows where she has gone. The story reaches its climax when, about a month later, Joseph passes on the street someone who looks like Miss Blossom, but in a style of dress that he does not recognize. When he slows his car down to look, it is indeed Miss Blossom. He asks if she has been to New York and she replies, “No, I was in Fort Lawdadale. You seem to think only Bella one [alone] can go to America.”

Goodison’s story treats a serious topic with hilarity which is not surprising, as mentioned before, since humor has a special role in Caribbean life (Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001). It is noteworthy that Goodison, a Jamaican woman, provides such an accurate portrait of left-behind husband Joseph. Comparators between the fictional story and this study’s real life include:

1. The decision for the wife to migrate is jointly made by the spouses, for the economic welfare of the family.

2. Initially, both spouses believe the new marital arrangement is justified and expect the separation to be of short duration.

3. Bella visits twice in the year, but everyday communication is infrequent as the spouses depend on letters. When Bella calls, it is to leave a message for Joseph at “the grocery shop.”

4. The family is probably lower middle class, as they have no telephone at home.

5. Bella thinks that Joseph may become involved with an other woman, but hopes that he will not. The two women never meet. Miss Blossom knows about Bella, but Bella does not know of Miss Blossom’s existence.

6. The traditional Jamaican male-female roles become entangled through migration. Bella is “making life” for herself, rather than depending on Joseph, and Joseph has to “mother and father” the children, even plaiting his daughter’s hair.
Although Joseph is absent from her everyday life, Bella still considers him to be the head of the family.

The passage of time produces a negative correlation in the couple’s living-apart experience, Bella becomes more self-fulfilled, in a sense happier, as Joseph becomes more lonely and sad.

Joseph’s suspicion, from the growing infrequency of her letters, that his wife has “changed” is confirmed when she comes to visit. He blames “America” for this.

Bella has become more assertive and individualistic, which produces an ambivalent response in Joseph, who is pleased at her ability to take care of herself but appalled at her self-absorption.

Goodison manages to describe the relationship between the husband and the other woman in a way that this study with its limited sample could not. The theme of wife abroad and husband “friending” with an other woman at home is a common one in Jamaica. A teacher colleague claimed that there is even a new term for such relationships, “comarital,” replacing the old term, “extramarital.” Some of the husbands interviewed had indeed experienced a situation similar to that of Joseph.

The Real Stories: The Study’s Respondents “Make Life”

Like Joseph and Bella, the majority of the couples in this study decided jointly for the wife to migrate for the betterment of their families. Even the wife who claimed that her husband made the decision because of “political instability” was concerned for their family’s economic welfare. Like the fictional couple, the real couples considered the decision justified and expected the transnational arrangement to be of short duration. Joseph and Bella communicated as best they could, as do the couples in this study who have more resources, including Face Time and Skype, at their disposal. Like Bella, wives in the study earned more income in the United States than before migration in Jamaica, and most of them ended up with more “dollars” than their husbands. However, also like Bella, the wives still considered their husbands to be the head of
the family and looked to them for advice. In her study, Rawlins (2006, 39) noted “the societal expectation . . . that [Jamaican] women should defer to men and allow men to appear to be the ones in charge, at least in public.” While enjoying their separate freedoms, most of the study’s couples want to remain married, as did Bella and Joseph. When Miss Blossom’s “friendship” with Joseph becomes intimate, she expects him to leave Bella for her, but he tells her plainly that this is not his intent.

Adult children in the study had lived transnationally also, some with their mother in the United States, others with their father in Jamaica, so both spouses had for some time been involved in different aspects of childcare. Traditional Jamaican male-female roles became entangled, sometimes reversed, as both husbands and wives continued to work for the family. It is Joseph’s turn to experience the unequal household division of labor, a social problem to which immigrant wives in this study hope never to return. When Joseph reads Bella’s letter that she has gone to Bear Mountain with friends to “enjoy” herself, he is incensed:

Enjoy herself? This time Joseph was working so hard to send the two children to school clean and neat. . . . Enjoy himself? Joseph friend them start to laugh after him because is like him done with woman.

The reaction of Joseph’s friends, however, is more reminiscent of the Filipino and Vietnamese husbands mentioned in Chapter II than of the husbands in this study. When Jamaican mothers emigrate, small children are usually left with their father but in the care of female kin. For example, the left-behind son in Chapter IV who was four when his mother migrated was his father’s responsibility but lived with his grandaunt. The adult children interviewed were older when their mothers left.

The passage of time is where “Bella Makes Life” and the real stories in this study diverge. Already in a year so much has happened—one can but wonder how ten years or more of
living apart would affect this marriage. Joseph attributes the “changes” in Bella to acculturation to U.S. mores. Bella, however, claims that she has not “changed”–she is just seizing the new opportunities that have been afforded her. As mentioned earlier, wives in this study assigned “changes” in their behavior to maturity rather than acculturation but husbands and adult children disagreed, assertiveness being the main quality under contention even though female assertiveness is a characteristic of Jamaican society. Perhaps the difference between a Jamaican wife in Jamaica and a Jamaican immigrant wife in the United States is that the latter feels that she has social approval to express disapproval of her husband’s actions, while the former feels that she must suffer in silence. Teerob indicated in a 2006 “Daddy-Oh” column that this attitude might be changing: 

[W]omen tend to grow up, want to assert themselves, and the man fails to take notice. For years they have been living in the shadow of their husbands, doing his every bidding, taking his advice blindly, following in his footsteps and being more of a child than a grown woman.

This study was initially conceived as a migration problem. However, when I asked my father about wives who did not return home even when their husbands were critically ill, his response, “Sometimes the men treat the women so badly early in the marriage that later when the wives get the opportunity they leave,” gave me a new view. When wives in the study seemed unbelievably tolerant of husbands’ infidelity, often “actions spoke louder than words,” as in the case of the wife who only spoke to her dying husband on the phone and who did not come home to bury him–an important cultural duty for a Jamaican wife to perform. During the years that this wife was away in the United States, however, her husband had fathered two children outside of the marriage, so this may have been her way of finally expressing her disapproval.

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22 “Didn’t you get the memo?” Sunday Observer, December 10, 12.
The migration experiences of the participants in this study were more varied than initially expected. Spouses’ narratives emphasized four main themes: (1) sexuality; (2) infidelity; (3) respect; and (4) security. In the fictional story, Joseph begins as a faithful husband, forgetting his sexual needs as he takes on the additional job of caring for his son and daughter. The length of time apart and arguably the growing “disrespect” on the part of his wife urge him to be unfaithful, especially because Miss Blossom is available and willing. Bella’s absence and behavior and Joseph’s subsequent relationship with Miss Blossom threaten to destroy the family’s security. In the real life stories of this study, some Jamaican husbands were unfaithful before their wives migrated; others were unfaithful with time; only a few had never been unfaithful. Other women were also available and willing. Wives were socialized to forgive their husbands, as long as they were not “disrespected.” Most spouses, wives and husbands, did not want the security of their marriages to be destroyed. Two additional subsidiary themes, religion and divorce, and slavery and “culture” are also analyzed.

**Sexuality**

As evidenced in the responses in Chapter IV, husbands in this study placed great emphasis on sexual fulfillment, whereas wives did not. Husbands freely admitted that sex was most important, even essential, to their lives, whereas one wife declared, “Both men and women can live without sex, if they want to.” In observing Jamaican society one cannot help but notice the preoccupation with sexuality and infidelity. A sampling of news articles between 2004 and 2006 included: “Can men do without sex?” by freelance writer Joy Crawford, in the “all woman sexuality” column in the Monday *Observer* of May 3, 2004; “Licensing the Jamaican penis,” an open letter to Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller by “contributor” Kevin O’Brien Chang (*Sunday Gleaner*, April 16, 2006); and “Nuff Gal! Should Jamaica Legalise Polygamy?” –a
survey launched in the Sunday Gleaner’s Outlook supplement of October 22, 2006. In an article in the press entitled “Compulsive Sexual Behavior,” Dr. Sidney McGill described the “hypersexuality” of the Jamaican male as pathological:

To prove his manhood, the pleasure of sexual gratification itself and the satisfaction in knowing that he can sexually satisfy one or more women, at the drop of a hat, can become a central part of a man’s reason to live. His sexual prowess and frequency are directly proportional to his self-esteem and positive image of masculinity: less so on his ability to commit himself to a long-term relationship and the responsibilities involved. . . . Successful treatment is possible, but will depend on a strong desire to regain control of your sexual self and rearrange your life for greater meaning and purpose. 23

When Goodison’s Bella begs Joseph in a letter to remain faithful, she declares that she “know[s] . . . a man is different from a woman.” If indeed Jamaican men possess a stronger and longer-lasting sex drive than Jamaican women, it would seem that transnational couples who intend to stay together should place a limit on how much money they need to make so that they can place a limit on how much time they will spend apart. However, some wives in this study have evidently decided to ignore their own and their husbands’ sexual needs and let the chips fall where they will.

The Life Course and the “Young Girl (YG) Phenomenon”

It may be that Jamaican men make better husbands as they grow older, not just because they are more financially stable but because they may have grown to place a greater value on legal marriage. Unfortunately, some Jamaican wives leave their marriages, albeit informally, without ever finding this out. Or it may be, as my would-be psychologist teacher colleague opined, that in older Jamaican men “suppressed desires emerge and there is an emotional void. With the younger women, they feel appreciated, taken care of. Men turn to younger women to make up for what they think they missed.” During my stay in Jamaica from 2004 to 2007, I was

struck by the “Young Girl (YG) Phenomenon, that is, how many attractive young Jamaican women were not just consorting with but marrying men sometimes two or three times their own age.

It is common knowledge that in Jamaica girls rely on older men to pay school fees and buy books— one husband in the study related how a young girl “wanted him to send her to school.” The harsh reality is that, “in a culture that assigns . . . major responsibility of child-rearing, nurturing and caring to women and girls . . . . [some of them] are forced by circumstances to continue to struggle to barely survive” (Simms 2004). In the “Doctor’s Advice” column in the Gleaner’s Outlook supplement of January 16, 2005, a “girl of 18” wrote: “I have a new boyfriend. He is rich. He is a lot older than me. But he is real kind and generous. He is paying my rent, and he gives me pocket money.” Her complaint to the doctor was, as might be expected, sexual in nature. Of course there was no way to know whether the letter was true—it may have been made up by the Doctor himself to bring the issue to public attention.

Two questions on this fairly recent phenomenon in Jamaican society were posed to respondents in this study as part of their reflection on marriage. The underlying intent was to elicit information on spouses’ gendered approach to sexuality, especially in relation to age. Older husbands spoke freely and at length about their sexuality, whereas older wives seemed to emphasize companionship rather than sexual satisfaction. Rawlins (2006, 10) noted the “negativity in the discourses surrounding the sexuality of older women:” the widespread perception is that Afro-Caribbean women lose interest in sexual intimacy after a certain age, while Afro-Caribbean men retain their interest well into their eighth decade, as evidenced in some respondent responses. One husband declared that

Jamaican women lose interest in sex once they are over 40; they get tired. Jamaican men have sex too much because there is nothing to occupy them.
Englishmen join clubs, etc., and come home tired. American women have sexual relations even when they are 80; they wear make-up, etc.

This husband expressed delight that his father had just remarried, at the age of 96, to a woman in her 60s because

the main thing in life is to have someone who cares for you. He can’t have sex, he’s impotent, but she’s not interested in that anymore. Their marriage is going very well. She prepares breakfast for him every morning.

Rawlins, however, from interviewing a large sample of 200 “midlife and older” women (aged 50 to 74) from two communities in Kingston, one middle-class, the other working-class, found that what women [of the older age group] said and did with regard to their sexuality was obviously bound up with ideas about what was the proper personal and sexual behavior . . . . others were reluctant to accept male companionship, or establish new relationships, because they were concerned about what their sons, especially, might think of them . . . . Those sexually active were mainly the younger women, fifty to fifty-nine years old, but women at seventy years old were also sexually active among the middle class.24

Some of her respondents did, however, “put issues of sexuality out of their minds,”25 especially widows, many of whom claimed not to “feel the sex urge any more.”26 Rawlins concluded:

There were a number of contradictions in the discourse concerning the sexuality of women of this age group and these women deliberately subdued aspects of their sexuality because of their fear of being in conflict with their grown offspring, church and wider society.27

Articles in the Jamaican press confirmed that older women’s lessened interest in sexual intimacy (“hypoactive sexual desire disorder (HSDD)”) was of social concern. The Gleaner’s Outlook supplement of December 19, 2004 featured an article, “Why do women lose interest in sex?” Most reasons offered were medical, but “interpersonal relationship issues” and

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24 Rawlins 2006, 63.
25 Ibid, 64.
26 Ibid, 125.
27 Ibid, 143.
“depression . . . very common in women especially past 40s” were also mentioned. In 2006, Teerob wrote in his weekly “Daddy-Oh” column, “Finding Me:”

[Women] get fatter by the year, the kids grow up and move out, quickly followed by the husband or if he doesn’t, he’s traipsing around with a younger, slimmer version of what she used to be. . . . [I]f the other woman is motivation, then more power to her, as at least it will make more wives snap out of their lethargy and jump on the treadmill of life.28

If indeed, as Dr. McGill claims, Jamaican men of all ages are hypersexual while Jamaican women of a certain age are hyposexual, problems are inevitable. However, it is evident that times are changing since a Jamaican gynecologist confirms that in her practice more women than before have consulted her on how to regain the libido they believe they have lost and, in a “Dear Counsellor” letter to the Gleaner in 2007,29 a 40-year-old woman sought advice because she had “lost her sexual nature.”

The YG phenomenon would certainly militate against older women who wanted to continue being sexually active, as they would find fewer partners in Jamaican society. In June 2000, an article by contributor Mark A. Wignall, “In praise of younger women,” appeared in the Jamaica Observer. On the surface it seemed that this article bore the tongue-in-cheek quality of columnist Teerob, but a closer reading reveals that Wignall is not only “praising younger women” but also seriously disparaging older women, even suggesting to older husbands that they leave their wives. Wignall begins his article with a description of the decline of a marriage. Twenty-four-year-old man marries twenty-three-year-old woman, who is a “drop-dead beauty.” After two children, one instance of husband infidelity and 20 years of marriage, both spouses have gained weight with age. Unfortunately, however, it is only the wife’s weight that is a problem. The husband thinks the weight “hangs well” on himself, while on his wife it is “just

28 Jamaica Observer, May 7, 8.
29 Saturday, June 2, A3.
hanging.” The husband still “really, truly” loves his wife, but he is now “sexually ‘neutral’”
toward her. Claiming that he is “not condemning marriage. It’s a great institution for those who
like to take impossible vows that they will never be able to live up to,” Wignall is unapologetic:

> [I]s the younger woman better? Yes, yes, and yes. Without apology, yes! The younger woman energizes you . . . . What of sex? If she is beautiful and you have made a mental connection with her, the lovemaking will be as torrid as in the movies and no older woman can compete with her in the sheer sensuality of the experience. . . . God has a sense of humour . . . . [H]e pulled a hoax on woman by making gravity unkind to her. I am by no means saying that a man cannot find his wife of 60 to be sensual and sexy but if that man is honest and if he is offered (just for a night) a choice between his old-faithful and a twenty-three-year-old firm, smooth, delectable, warm beauty of creation, I would want to meet the man who would choose wifey. A rare man.

With such advice in the daily newspaper, it is no wonder that an older Jamaican immigrant wife might prefer to remain in the United States indefinitely, surrounded by her children and grandchildren, eschewing the female (younger) competition on the Jamaican scene. Best (2002)’s concern, mentioned in Chapter II, that older women in Jamaica will not find companionship seems warranted. Jamaican childhood socialization, also described in Chapter II, indicates that men will continue to compare, and women to compete. It is quite normal, for example, to see a couple out for the evening in Jamaica, the woman beautifully dressed, well made-up and coiffed, the man in his T-shirt, shorts and sandals. Dressmakers and cosmetics dealers profit considerably from the competition between Jamaican women for male attention.

Foucault (1976) describes two “deployments”: the deployment of alliance—a system of marriage, of fixation and development of kinship ties, of transmission of names and possessions; and the deployment of sexuality—concerned with the sensations of the body, the quality of pleasures, and the nature of impressions, however tenuous or imperceptible these may be. It may be that the Jamaican woman is more interested in the former, while the Jamaican man’s interest is vested in the latter.
Infidelity

The length of time spent apart transnationally by the couples in this study may aggravate the divergence in sexual attitudes between husbands and wives. If sexual needs are, as some maintain, biological rather than socially and culturally acquired, infidelity should be understandable in both left-behind husbands and immigrant wives. Bonnett (1990, 141) noted the options for an immigrant wife to manage her sexuality: she may form relationships “few and spasmodic, often revolving around sexual contact” or “with second-generation male migrants who are married;” or “avoid social relationships at all costs.” This last option was the one expressed by the majority of this study’s wives, which Bonnett describes:

They work endlessly – double shifts, triple shifts – to amass money to send remittances back to the islands – back home – or to make a down payment on a brownstone in Brooklyn or Queens or a house in Fort Myers, Florida. They have few friends and are devoid of “significant others” and the social networks so prevalent in earlier migrations.

D’Amico (1993, 82) explains the role economics play in infidelity:

[A] man who cannot support his household lives in fear of being cuckolded, as a woman is justified in seeking support (and sex) elsewhere . . . . In this scenario, both poor and better-off women are expected to accept the infidelity of the financially able man, while they remain faithful to him.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, most of the husbands in this study were absolutely certain that their wives had been faithful while wives did not expect their husbands to be faithful, but rather hoped that they would be. Wives seemed to believe in the idealism of legal marriage, that vows and a beautiful wedding ceremony were enough to undo the effects of gendered childhood socialization. They did not seem concerned, perhaps because they lived so far away, with the stereotypical claim maintained by some husbands in the study that Jamaican women change as soon as they are married, settling into the “wife” pattern of homemaking, no longer interested in the spontaneity and sexuality of the courting times. Neither did wives seem unduly threatened
by the belief in Jamaica, as in other West Indian islands, the United States, and perhaps other areas of the world, that “the man who is sexually satisfied will not stray.” This study’s Jamaican transnational wives seemed to confirm the statement of a teacher colleague about wives in Jamaica: “Once bills are paid and they are not being abused, women no longer hold out for an exclusive marriage.”

Wilson’s (1969) theory, “respectability vs. reputation,” argues that Caribbean women take pride in being “respectable,” while men are concerned with their “reputation.” A Caribbean wife’s sexuality is governed by her fidelity, which is her “reputation” and ensures the “respectability” of her family. Conversely, a husband’s sexuality includes infidelity, which is his “reputation;” respectability is not his concern. As Teerob recalled in a 2006 column, “We are moulded by society . . . . [G]irls can’t do what the guys do and still be a lady.”

Rawlins (2006, 41) tells the story of a fifty-year old Jamaican, “Mrs. Ulett,” married since she was nineteen, who “coped with her family by . . . ignoring her husband’s constant infidelity” and who “did not allow what her husband did to bother her.” Rawlins (2006, 62) goes on to describe “[t]he cultural expectations of what Caribbean male-female behaviour should be for this age group . . . . [t]he norm . . . that men can do ‘whatever’ and women are expected to forgive them.” A few of this study’s wives migrated before joining “this age group,” in order to escape from such husbands.

Barrow (1976, 204) notes that

central to a woman’s reputation is her sexual behavior, ideally that of restraint, obedience and faithfulness to her man. Most women, married or not, expect that their men will have “outside women” and this does not bring shame unless it becomes publicly obvious, for example, if the “outside woman” lives in the area and “outside children” are produced. However, her shame is more akin to embarrassment, in contrast to the humiliation to her man if she follows the same course of action.

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30 Title of an ‘oldie but goodie’ by Black American singer Betty Wright, very popular in Jamaica in the 1960s, quoted in Robinson’s “Bad Women” article.
The absence of the words “shame” and “embarrassment” in the responses of this study’s respondents is another indication of changing times, invalidating Wilson’s theory. Husbands were angry, not ashamed, at wives’ infidelity; wives were disappointed, not embarrassed, by husbands’ infidelity. To rephrase Barrow’s first sentence above, wives in this study seemed to think that “central to a man’s reputation should be his sexual behavior, ideally that of restraint, obedience and faithfulness to his woman.” Both husbands and wives had been socialized in Jamaica to expect that men, not women, would be unfaithful. If these are the gendered expectations of Jamaican spouses in a marriage, how are they supposed to get along? Some of this study’s wives were no longer willing to accept this cultural practice. Women of all ages in the study—wives, adult children, even other women—stated a preference to be alone rather than with husbands who were chronically unfaithful. Adult daughters’ responses recall Beyrer’s (1998, 124) comment on Southeast Asia:

The daughters of these women might tell you a very different story . . . young women who want to be a part of their husbands’ erotic lives, not just dutiful and sexless mothers of children.

Bao (2005, 21) describes a Chinese’s wife’s response to her husband’s taking a Thai mistress:

After uncovering her husband’s affair, she moved into her own bedroom, resisting her husband’s authority by detaching herself sexually but maintaining the marital bond.

One wife in this study behaves in a similar way when her husband is forced to sleep on the couch when he comes to visit. This pattern is not uncommon in Jamaica, where some married couples share the same house but sleep on separate levels, or in separate rooms. A female student in the high school where I taught suffered a decline in her school performance because of the stress
created by her parents living in separate areas of their home and communicating with each other only through her.

The middle-aged wife in the study who admitted to reciprocating her husband’s infidelity—he had been unfaithful and so, therefore, had she—reflects the new Jamaican society which has begun to question the moral double standard. In 2004, freelance writer Joy Crawford asked in the Daily Observer, “Are men really that different from women?”31 She concluded that they are not. Other articles on the “cheating” of men appeared in the press, for example: “Why he cheats, a mini-survey of men and women, in 2004;”32 and “Why I committed adultery”33 by family counsellor Ronald Clarke, in 2006. However, articles also appeared on the cheating of women: “Why married women cheat?” by Heather Little-White, in 2001;34 and “Cheating Wives” by the same author in the same newspaper, in 2006.35

In 2004, there were two important columns in two weeks by Little-White on infidelity: “The many men of Mary”36 was first, followed by “The many women of Paul.”37 By declaring that names were “changed for privacy,” Little-White implied that the stories were true. Notably, Mary is older than Paul. She is 62, even though she “ages well and looks no more than 30,” while Paul is 39. Mary, “separated [not divorced] from her husband for 12 years . . . works as a business development consultant and travels the world on business.” Paul is “a savvy . . . businessman.” Mary “has multiple sexual relationships with five men” which “keep her intellectually stimulated and sexually satisfied:” “the husband [still]; the businessman; the

31 August 16, “allwoman” supplement.
32 “Sex and Relationship” section, the Gleaner’s Flair supplement, Monday, November 15.
33 Outlook Magazine, the Sunday Gleaner, March 26.
34 Ibid, July 8.
35 Ibid, October 1, 7 and 8.
36 Ibid, August 22.
37 Ibid, August 29.
dentist; the Australian; and the younger man.” Paul is “married with two children and four sweethearts:” “the cosmetologist, the banker, the dancer, and the woman next door.”

Perhaps the attitudes of most of the immigrant wives in this study, however, did not reflect this changing face of infidelity perhaps because they have been out of Jamaica too long. In a reggae hit tune heard in Jamaica, for example, a woman complains to a male friend of her man’s abuse. In response he advises, “Bun ‘im . . . tek de house an lan an run ‘im; tek de car an van an run ‘im; tek man pon ‘im an run ‘im.”38 The “multiple man” syndrome is constantly discussed: “one to pay the rent, one to buy food, one to buy clothes, one to provide transport.” In another tune, the man asks his woman, “Why don’t you tell me that so many men come here? Before you let me come here?”

The Other Woman

The implication from the interviews in this study is that, if Goodison’s Joseph wants to keep his marriage over time, he should not find another Miss Blossom. Bella may be understanding enough to forgive him for a few indiscretions, but he should not form a steady relationship with an other woman. Unlike Goodison’s Miss Blossom,” the “other women” in this study seemed to maintain a rather passive role, caring for the left-behind husband in Jamaica for years, sometimes even bearing children for him, while respectfully deferring to the symbolic presence of the wife abroad. Unfortunately, only two “other women” were interviewed for this study and two others were reported on by a friend and a daughter, respectively. Observation of Jamaican society had to be relied upon to fill in the blanks.

38 Translated into English: Be unfaithful to him; take away his house and land and chase him; take away his car and van and chase him; become sexually involved with another man and chase him.
Jamaican newspapers carried articles with titles such as: “The other woman;”39 “No loyalty to the other woman;”40 “Bad women;”41 and “My married man.”42 According to the articles, there are two kinds of other women: those who wander into the situation, “fall in love” then remorsefully declare that they would never choose that role again; and those who declare, “It works for me. I don’t cook, clean, or do laundry.” The first group really cares for the husbands; the second group of women care more for themselves. One woman in the second group even declared, “You make sure not to fall in love. Once you see that happening, you break it off.”43 The second group does not want to be married; the first group does. The first group forms serious, long-lasting relationships; the second group tends to become involved in what Teerob calls “sequential adultery.” Note Miss Blossom in Goodison’s tale was being visited by another married man before Joseph became interested, even though initially she seemed to fit more into the first group.

The first group is therefore more of a threat to the immigrant wife living abroad. In his Sunday Observer, June 11, 2006, article, Teerob states that some women have relationships with married men for over 20 years, “longer than many marriages.” He quotes Shakespeare’s All’s Well That Ends Well: “Get thee a good husband,/And use him/As he uses thee,” adding, tongue-in-cheek, that it does not matter whose husband it is. Interestingly, Teerob states that a husband’s other woman is no longer of a lower class than the wife, a change from the days of colonialism and slavery discussed in Chapter II:

39 Flair, Monday, November 15, 2004, author not stated.
40 Joy Crawford, “No loyalty to the other woman,” Sex and Relationship” Column, Flair Supplement, Daily Gleaner, Monday, March 6, 2006, 16.
43 “The Other Woman” article referred to above.
She is either a lawyer, corporate executive, CEO, director of the board or even principal of a prominent high school . . . . She believes the lies of the married man who forever fills her head that he is on the verge of leaving his wife.

In the same article, Teerob also mentions the “insanity” of women who go “away for years and think that their men are not sleeping with anyone else,” that is, our transnational wives.

One evening in 2007 in Jamaica, the entire segment of “Our Show,” a program on Radio Jamaica (RJR), the oldest Jamaican radio station, was entitled, “The Other Woman.” A woman, who did not identify herself, telephoned the program to request advice. “Years ago” (she seemed embarrassed, and did not reply, when the moderator asked how many) when she began a relationship with a left-behind husband, “it was OK;” now it was no longer “worth it.” In the first five years, she said, the wife had visited the husband only once;\(^4\) the wife wanted to be in the United States, whereas the husband wanted to be in Jamaica. She thought he was “keeping his wife” because she, the other woman, was “younger” (she did not say by how many years) and the husband was afraid she might leave him.\(^5\) As soon as she completed her story, a male caller responded that she was “travelling up the wrong street” and should break off the relationship immediately because he was sure she could “meet someone else.”

“Family Affair,” an award-winning play staged at Fairfield Theatre in Montego Bay on Saturday, September 9, 2006, was billed thus:

This piece is essentially about keeping the family together . . . even at costs. It might come across in a backhand or perverse manner, but sometimes we do learn the hard way. Sometimes we need to be more careful about who we “let in” our lives and sometimes our indiscretions can lead to heavy consequences.

The plot was as follows: a retired upper-class husband has decided to break off a relationship with a younger other woman, a successful professional in her own right, because he is consumed

\(^4\) She may have been illegal and could not visit.
\(^5\) Note the husband is said to have been worried that the other woman, not the wife, might leave.
with guilt and wants to retry his marriage, especially since his wife, also a successful professional, has overcome her drinking problem. The other woman is upset because the husband has complained to her so much about his wife that she was sure that divorce and remarriage to her were imminent. A situation occurs and the husband, his wife and their child attack the other woman. She produces a gun and in the ensuing struggle the gun goes off. She is killed and the family can continue, no longer threatened by her existence. A spinoff from the ‘fatal attraction’ theme, this play portrayed a traditionally negative public opinion of the other woman. This attitude has, however, been changing. In an interview in 2004, popular Jamaican singer Tanya Stephens claimed, “The other woman is a person, too, and all of us are sometimes the other woman,”46 and in another play staged during my years in Jamaica portrayed a wife and an other woman who actually formed a sisterhood in order to punish the husband for deceiving them both.

**Love and Affection**

What role do love and affection play in the marriages of these transnational couples? One husband declared that he married his wife because he was "madly in love with the woman." One wife's motivation to get married was also "love." The youngest wife is anxious to rejoin her husband because she is “in love with” him. Other spouses used words like "caring." An older husband in the study wondered why Jamaican couples had not imitated the British who colonized them:

> [The British] show affection for one another, but not in public. They kiss each other before they leave the house. The English have pet names for their wives. Jamaicans don’t show that affection. What happened?

As mentioned earlier, older spouses in this study claimed that their parents had loved, but not shown affection for, each other, intimating that they too had been less than affectionate. The

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wife who admitted that she loved her children more than her husband seemed to confirm Rawlins’ (2006, 47) claim that the traditionally high incidence of children born out of wedlock supports the assumption that, for the majority of women, motherhood is more important than wifehood.

Rawlins (52) also found that “feelings of closeness” among working-class women were, in order: daughters, mother or sister, sons, husbands; and, among the middle-class: daughters, mother or sister, husbands, sons. In both classes husbands were at the end, or toward the end, of the line.

Many husbands did not mention love for their wives: they “loved” the Merritone Disco, horse racing, sex, and living in Jamaica. One of the wives “loved” singing and her night job, but never mentioned love for her husband. On the other hand, the couple who migrated together to the United States and have celebrated their 25th anniversary (not in the sample but interviewed for comparison) mentioned the word “love” several times. The wife who claimed that her husband has said he no longer loves her admitted that she loved her children more than her husband. She had “made a decision” to love her husband, so she could not understand how he could decide not to love her. An older husband declared, “Love is not a feeling; it’s a situation, a place of safety.”

**Respect**

Colen (1995, 103), in discussing “depersonalization, trivialization, and lack of respect” as a real problem for West Indian household workers in New York, cites anthropologists’ claim that:

> respect is a central concept in West Indian social relations . . . . Individuals behave in a manner which indicates self-respect, which gains the respect of others, and which gives respect where it is due.

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47 This most-popular, internationally renowned sound system in Jamaica, directed by the Blake brothers, Trevor, Winston, Tyrone, and Monty until Tyrone passed on in 2012, celebrated its 63rd anniversary in 2013.
On the whole, husbands and wives spoke respectfully, rather than disparagingly, about their spouses and marriages. The major issue, linked with fidelity, for all the study’s women—wives and other women—was respect. Wives thought that, if their husbands could not be faithful, at least they could be circumspect, “respectful,” in their infidelity. As stated in Chapter IV, wives would be forgiving, as long as they were not “disrespected.” “Lack of respect” figured prominently in two wives’ decision to file for divorce.

The respect that the Jamaican wives in this study crave is not the one mentioned by Smith (2006, 97) in his analysis of Mexicans in New York, reminiscent of the childhood socialization discussion above:

[A] marriage of respect resonates with ranchero masculinity and ranchera femininity in emphasizing the man’s power and honor, the woman’s deference and modesty, and the separation of men and women in social space.

It is not the respect of Wilson’s (1969) theory of “respectability vs. reputation,” nor that which Gmelch and Gmelch’s Barbadian male respondent (1997, 168-169) evokes when he describes how Afro-Caribbean wives of long ago gained respect from accepting their husbands’ infidelity:

[M]ost West Indian men believe that they should have more than one woman in their lives, so my great-grandfather had about three women, and all three had a number of children from him. Your wife accepted that you have to have an outside woman, your wife accepted your outside children, and thus all became part of the family. . . . His other women called my great-grandmother, “Sis.” She was married to him, so the respect was paid to her. . . . Of course, back then, times were hard and for a woman to bring up a family completely on her own would have been very difficult.

Wives in this study completely rejected the culturally-accepted moral double standard whereby the Jamaican family’s respect resides in the behavior of the wife alone and wives in Jamaica are rejecting this too. In an “open letter to all women” (Letter to the Editor, The Gleaner, October 15, 2001), Mrs. Jean Forbes called for Jamaican childhood socialization to change and for
Jamaican men to respect their women. She asked the “women of the world, the nurturers of the future, who build ‘the type of world we want’ to join in her promise”:

I will bring up my girl children to be strong independent women, who will demand that any man who wishes to build a life with them understands that he will do so with respect. . . . I will bring up my boy children to respect women. To be all the things I want in a perfect man. . . . I will tell him that scattering his seed far and wide is the mark of an animal, not a man. I will tell him that the mark of a man is the nurturing of the seed, so that it will grow to make him proud. . . . For it is in understanding human fatherhood that he will understand the fatherhood of God.

Husbands in this study also alluded to respect, but with mixed meanings. One husband claimed

I have achieved greater respectability. When people get married in JA people observe and/or presume the marriage is happy or working. The assessment by “John Public” is that the marriage is successful.

Husbands esteem this social respectability and are reluctant to lose it by divorce. Some husbands’ definition of respect is, however, related to Wilson’s reputation, as in the case of the husband who kept count of his many women “out of respect.”

To be “taken for granted” is seen as a mark of disrespect. In “My Married Man,”48 Teerob quotes a wife who “almost wandered” because “husbands tend to ignore their wives after a few years and most of all take them for granted.” Rawlins (2006, 2) found that in Jamaica women over 50 “are often taken for granted by those around them, and even by themselves.” In “Woman Reclaimed,” an Outlook article by writer Avia Ustanny,49 Cheryl Brown, describing her then-recent achievement of a law degree, indicated that she had been taken for granted in her marriage of 29 years which had ended in divorce:

Over time people can lose a sense of who they are. I had totally lost myself. I did not know who I was, doing a lot of things over the years that impressed other people, loyal friend, mother, sister, wife. In trying to live up to the expectations of

49 The Gleaner, January 2, 2005, 10, 15 and 22.
everybody, I did not know who I was. . . . In Jamaica, people love to put you in categories. If you are divorced you are viewed as a victim. But there is nobody less victim-like than myself.

This resonates with the wives in the study who felt they had to emigrate to self-actualize. In the case of the husband who migrated to join his wife in the United States and was surprised when she divorced him, his wife claimed that she had told him long before that the marriage was over but he did not believe her because he never paid attention. Teerob’s article, “Didn’t you get the memo?” mentions such a husband, “taken by surprise” because he “didn’t read all the signs and signals that his wife was sending him over the years.” A husband in the same Teerob article explains why he felt taken for granted:

Wives change and lose interest in everything else as soon as they have children. The man becomes nothing but someone who lives in the house and pays the bills. They also get fat.

A wife’s living apart for an extended period may also be seen as a mark of disrespect toward her husband since she is effectively taking him for granted. Goodison’s Miss Blossom alludes to this. When Joseph mentions that “respect is due” to Bella as his children’s mother, she retorts that Bella should have respected the family by staying with them, instead of migrating.

**The Dream House**

Another sign of a left-behind husband’s lack of respect and a stated ground for divorce was the mismanagement of an immigrant wife’s remittances. A husband who squandered his wife’s hard-earned funds was clearly disrespectful of both her efforts and her ambitions, especially her desire for her dream home. The word “house” appeared constantly in the interviews: most of the huge houses nestled in the Jamaican hills, especially in rural areas, are

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built with remittances. Three of this study’s wives mentioned expressly the importance of owning their own home. Douglass (1992, 70) notes:

A house is of prime importance to Jamaicans . . . . A house displays to the community a family’s character. Jamaicans say they are “houseproud” and their homes and gardens reflect this.

Horst (2006), in studying the return migration of Jamaicans from the United Kingdom to Mandeville, Jamaica, discusses this Jamaican cultural value:

The ethos of owning land and constructing a big, dream house has an historical foundation in Jamaica’s colonial plantation culture . . . . land and property became the way through which Afro-Jamaicans could achieve personhood . . . . returnees often admit that their sense of self is wrapped up in the house . . . . the dream house single-handedly represents and validates years of hard work.

The older husband, whose “good sweetheart, his secretary” had helped him run his business, bought her a house. The adult child of the other woman, whose father had actually had a wife and two other women, was upset that her father bought the second other woman a house because she did not think it was deserved. An older husband’s advice from his father confirmed Edith Clarke’s (1957, 51) finding that, at the time of her research in three communities in Jamaica, it was not “considered correct for a man to propose marriage unless he owned a house and, preferably, a bit of land.” Couples in Jamaica today still postpone weddings for years as they strive to own their own homes. This cultural value kept some of the couples in this study apart for more years than they intended, and mismanagement of funds earmarked for “the house” was the only event, besides respect, that was unforgiveable and might lead to divorce.

Forgiveness

The Jamaican immigrant wives in this study indicate that it is far easier to forgive your husband from a distance, when his infidelity is not “in your face” and when your everyday life is

52 Thomas-Hopeo (1998) also discusses this cultural value.
not spent fulfilling his every wish, that is, when you live apart transnationally. When in Jamaica Rosemarie (Rosie) Stone (2007, 1), a faithful wife, contracted AIDS from her unfaithful husband, Carl Stone, “university professor, newspaper columnist at the Daily Gleaner and well-known and highly respected political pollster,” she realized that she had to forgive him immediately, in order to get on with trying to save his life and hers. Had her husband not passed on shortly after his diagnosis (he had already contracted the virus some five years before he was diagnosed), Rosie may not have lived to tell the tale, as she became so involved with protecting him that she denied her own care. Rosie’s story, although more a study of her 15-year struggle (1991-2006) with the virus and its attendant stigma and discrimination in Jamaican society than of her 17-year marriage, is still an “account as a wife writing about her relationship with her husband.” Rosie provides unprecedented insight into a high-profile Jamaican marriage, especially regarding the concept of forgiveness.

Security

Security, although not expressly mentioned, clearly featured in the maintaining of the Jamaican transnational marriages studied. Rawlins (2006, 37) found that the older married women in her study “usually stay married; divorces are rare . . . and if there is a separation, it is usually informal.” A wife in this study stated that the “young girls phenomenon” was because “they think older men have better security,” and security is important.

Migration can produce a level of insecurity. All immigrant wives in this study were grateful for the security of joining family and friends already in the United States and kinship ties were carefully maintained in Jamaica through remittances and visits to the same end. Basch et al. (1994, 112, 167) found that

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53 Her husband is already gone on page 93 of 292 pages.
54 Stone 2007, xx.
The social validation to be found in their home societies...[is] particularly important for those in the lower middle stratum. . . . investments at home, in addition to providing a place for immigrants to return to when they retire or when times get hard, are important sources of much needed status affirmation.

. . . .

The impetus to maintain personal networks then comes not only from loyalty and sentiment but from a realization, which actually grows over time, of the precariousness of rooting oneself in the U.S.

Spouses enjoyed the security of being able to count on each other. Wives felt secure in continuing to bear the respected title of “Mrs.” and knowing that their and their children’s inheritance was intact. Goodison’s Joseph tells his other woman that “respect is due” to his wife because she is the mother of his children. Children add to the security of a Jamaican marriage. If there are no children from the marriage, the immigrant wife may need to be concerned. If the other woman bears a child, the wife may receive an unpleasant surprise if the husband passes. Perhaps that was the reason for the funeral quarrel between the two daughters mentioned in Chapter IV. Stories are told in Jamaica of husbands completely disinheriting their wives by assigning their holdings to the other family in their wills. Immigrant wives also enjoyed the security of their husbands’ protection, if even at a distance. For example, any male “friendships” formed in the host country would be held in check by the fact that they were married women. In this sense, like LAT couples, these transnational wives enjoyed the best of both married and unmarried worlds.

Husbands also benefited from the security of having a wife. As mentioned above, many wives in the study did not trust their husbands (Douglass found, in her 1992 study, that Jamaican women on the whole did not trust men), but husbands had complete trust in their wives. Husbands in the study were happy to be married because wives "help them spend their money wisely." For Handel’s (2000, 130) Tony Santangelo:

55 It is widely acknowledged that inheritance is one reason why marriage was invented.
marriage and parenthood seem important . . . as essential to a normal life. He got married and had children because he considered that that is what a man should do in order to lead a decent life. The particulars of family life are very often dissatisfying to him, but being a husband and father is essential to his sense of what he has done right in his life . . . . he considers that having a family saved him from a disreputable kind of manhood that would have been his fate as a single man.”

Similarly, a husband in this study claimed to have achieved:

better financial security. Greater control over excessive spending is practiced and a percentage of earnings is put aside for that “rainy day.”

That husbands were married also protected them from having to commit to other women who might enter their lives while their wives were away.

Other women also benefited from these marriages, as described above, especially when wives stayed away for many years. As long as the economic situation in Jamaica remains uncertain and income levels for some sectors of society remain low, some women will continue to be "in it for what they can get." Unlike American other women, who are portrayed as greedy and conniving, Jamaican other women seemed to crave the same security as wives and economic survival was a more pressing, and sometimes obvious, motive for their relationship with left-behind husbands.

**Acculturation and the Migration Experience**

In 1986, Foner (147-148) described the changes she found in “Jamaican women in New York and London”:

One reason migrant women are more intolerant and demanding of men is that they have been influenced by American and English values that extol the ideal of marital fidelity and “family togetherness.” Also, migrant women are now more likely to look to their spouses for comfort, companionship, and assistance because mothers and other close female kin–ballasts of support in the West Indies–are often not available. Perhaps, too, the women are more willing to make demands on and complain to their husbands, and even risk breaking up their marriages altogether, now that wage-earning opportunities and government assistance offer
them greater possibilities for financial independence than were available in Jamaica.

In 1987, Foner noted the “friction” of unhappy wives and husbands in immigrant Caribbean marriages:

Some wives become more demanding of their husbands, for example, that husbands spend less time with “the boys” and more at home, since there are more household chores, no household help and little time. Many wives commute long distances to their jobs, so arrive home tired and unwilling to do household chores. Weekends are for relaxation, to recuperate from the work week, and not for housework either. This attitude gives rise to much friction in the home, as Jamaican husbands remember how they are catered to in Jamaica and object strongly to this new treatment.

Wives in Jamaica have also “become more demanding of their husbands,” whether from exposure to the rest of the world or just plain rejection of the unfair distribution of household labor. The difference is that household help is much more affordable, and therefore accessible, in Jamaica than in the United States. With transnationalism and the globalization of culture, it is often difficult to discern which culture is influencing which, as Sutton (1992) indicates when she mentions the “bidirectional” flows of culture.

No matter how much Jamaican immigrants, male and female, cling psychologically to the “rock” (the popular term for Jamaica), they cannot fail to be influenced by the American way of life. Kaufman (1986, 19), referring to George Herbert Mead and symbolic interactionism, states that people are not passive observers and reactors to their surroundings, rather they actively participate in their environment, creating their social reality and sense of self as they engage in community life and as they interpret and evaluate the meaning of their interactions with others.

Le Espiritu (2003, 161) mentions the “negative depiction” of U.S. families as “uncaring, selfish, and distant.” Smith (2006, 122) points out that “U.S. culture offers its own models of male privilege and female subordination.” Min (2001, 302) notes that the sudden increase in
immigrant women’s economic role . . . , dictated by the exigencies for their economic survival, does not change their own and their husbands’ traditional patriarchal customs brought with them from their home countries.

Before they emigrate, however, Jamaican women have already experienced Hochschild’s “second shift” (1989), of work inside and outside the home. Smith’s (2006, 97) description of the “New York” Jamaican woman:

an Americanized vision of independent womanhood who works, supports herself, and does not really need a man but would be prepared to marry one who shares her egalitarian vision

is not far removed from the description of the Afro-Caribbean slave woman who worked to support her family, nor from the immigrant wives described in this study who have seized the opportunity to work and support themselves and their families.

Whereas the husbands in this study tended to blame U.S. mores for “changes” in their wives, wives did not believe that the United States had “changed” them, but that American society had allowed them to be more freely and fully themselves. As mentioned above, changes in attitude they attributed to maturity. As elsewhere, however, better earnings and greater freedom of expression would produce a more assertive woman, more able to advocate for her human rights. The “discourse of liberation” seen in Rawlins’ Jamaican widows (2006, 118), for example, results from the confluence of all three of these factors: (1) maturity; (2) more income; and (3) greater freedom of expression.

Some acculturation—for the better—in the emigrant is always expected by kinfolk left behind in the Caribbean. In a famous Jamaican poem, “No Lickle Twang,” (“Not Even A Little Accent”), Louise Bennett (“Miss Lou”) (1966) described a mother’s disappointment on the return of her migrant son:

Me glad fi see yuh come back, bwoy, I’m glad to see you’re back, my boy,
But lawd, yuh let me dung
Me shame a yuh so till all a
Mi proudness drop a grung.

But Lord, you let me down
I’m so ashamed of you that all
My pride is on the ground.

Yuh mean yuh go dah Merica
An spen six whole monts deh,
An come back not a piece betta
Dan how yuh did go weh?

You mean you went to America
And spent six whole months there,
And come back no better
Than how you went away?

Bwoy, yuh no shame? Ah so yuh come?
Afta yuh stan so lang!
Not even lickle language, bwoy?
Not even lickle twang?

Boy, you have no shame? This is how you come?
After staying so long?
Not even a little foreign language, boy?
Not even a little accent?

On the other hand, the emigrant should not returned too changed as, in another well-known poem, “Dry-Foot Bwoy,” Miss Lou and her audiences laugh loudly at Mary’s son, recently returned from England, who no longer understands Jamaican patois and punctuates each sentence with “Jolly, jolly” and “Actually.” Transnational Jamaican wives were therefore expected to change but not too much, not like Bella. Husband respondents reported that their wives had become more independent, self-sufficient. Some thought this an improvement, others were not happy with the “new” women their wives had become. The latter cited one aspect of these “changes” that spoiled their annual visit(s): wives expected them to serve themselves food, while she went off to work, instead of placing the food on the table, as would happen in Jamaica.

It seems, from the responses of husbands in this study, that Jamaican men prefer to experience U.S. acculturation from the security of their homes in Jamaica. This is quite possible from cable television and contact with Americans on the island. When Handel’s (2000, 111) Tony Santangelo gets married, he continues the pattern of after-work sociability with peers that he enjoyed as a single man, a pattern he wants to regard as compatible with marriage, while his wife defines it as a failure to complete the transition to marriage.
Smith (2006, 112), in discussing Mexicans, mentions the male friendship ritual of drinking that is equally prevalent in Jamaican culture. “Friday Night with the Boys” and other such male social gatherings remains a factor in Jamaican husbands’ decision not to emigrate, as it is easier to orchestrate in a small island than a large metropolis. Moreover, the weather in Jamaica is better and the pace of life more relaxed. These husbands’ refusal to emigrate to the United States is reminiscent of the song written by Jamaican musician Pluto Shervington in 1975, three years after “socialist” Prime Minister Michael Manley was elected and nationalism was high. Manley used this song as the theme for his second election bid in 1976, when political violence was spurring wealthier Jamaicans to migrate:

One more Jamaican gaan abroad
One more disciple leave the yard
But I man on ya, I man born ya I live here, I was born here
I nah leave ya fi go a America I’m not leaving to go to America
No way sah, pot a bwayl ya, belly full ya No way! The pot is boiling, my belly is full
Sweet Jamaica.  

The fact seems to be that Jamaican men love living and feel more secure in Jamaica no matter how much they complain to each other in the rum bars or on the radio call-in shows about politics, violence, and crime.

**Religion and Divorce**

All spouses in this study, including the few who lost their marriages to divorce, considered marriage to be a sacred, serious commitment, not to be entered into lightly and not to be dissolved without extreme cause. Both husbands and wives seemed to agree with the biblical injunction: “what God has joined together, let no man put asunder” and, in rejecting divorce, they upheld the section of the marriage vows, “Till death do us part.” Only wives, however,

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56 Ironically, however, Pluto did migrate to Miami and still lives there (and probably performs the song) today.
seemed disposed to uphold that other phrase, “Forsaking all others.” Jamaicans are known to be religious. Rawlins (2006, 9) found that older women in Jamaica gain satisfaction from their relationship with the church in ways that they had not done in earlier years and so might choose to spend their spare time in church activities rather than in activities with men.

This seems to have been the case with some older wives in the study.

In Little-White’s *Gleaner* article, “The many women of Paul,” (2004) described above, Paul remarks that his behavior might be different “if he were deeply religious.” Infidelity has become an important topic for discussion in churches in Jamaica, perhaps because women are now also being unfaithful. In 2003, for example, in an article entitled, “Jamaica’s Grave Economic Challenges,” Ian Boyne stated that economics were forcing “good and faithful wives” in Jamaica into infidelity to make ends meet.\(^\text{57}\) In 2006, the “In Focus” segment of the *Sunday Gleaner* featured another article by Boyne, “Why marriages are failing.”\(^\text{58}\) Speaking out against the “alarming” increase of divorce in “the Western world,” in this “age of the Supremacy of Desire,” Boyne stated that (a) the fate of marriage would depend on the “ethics” of society’s norms; and (b) marriage should be enjoyed, not “endured”:

> If there is no set of objective ethical norms, if there is no conception of a transcendent ethics, no commitment to duties and responsibilities as opposed to drives and desires, then I am putting the axe to the foundation of marriage.

> Marriage should be mutually nourishing and enriching. The notion of some Christians that marriage should be simply an endurance game, a means of developing character and serving the other selflessly while carrying the cross is counter to both common sense and biblical teaching. But it is one thing to move from an ascetic view of marriage to one of libertarianism in which marriage is seen simply as a means of extracting personal gain and enrichment.

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58 October 10.
Indeed, the churches’ attitudes to marital relationships in Jamaica have also been changing. In May 2007, Boyne’s weekly program, “Religious Hard Talk,” aired on TVJ on Thursday evenings, tackled the “troubling and perplexing” topic: “Divorce and Remarriage.”

Acceptable Biblical reasons for divorce were restated as only “fornication” and “desertion,” and the Biblical stance on remarriage was stated as, “As long as your spouse is alive, you cannot remarry.” The chief Bible reference was I Corinthians: 7, arguably the most confused chapter in the Bible, from which most religious denominations in Jamaica obtain their policies on marriage and divorce and which is. The chapter begins with “It is good for a man not to touch a woman,” and concludes:

39 The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.

40 But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God.

Within the chapter, there are controversial and conflicting statements, for example:

7 The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband;

8 I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I.

9 But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.

10 And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband:

11 But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife.

The panel also referred to Matthew 19:9 (and Mark 10:11) in which Jesus said that both spouses in remarrying, “except it be for fornication,” “commit adultery” and pronounced the

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59 On the weekly program, Boyne tends to suppress his own opinion, choosing his panel carefully in an attempt at the widest possible exploration of the subject at hand.
Bible “not clear” on this issue. The main question before the panel seemed to be what should be done about “dysfunctional and destructive” marriages when, by breaking the vow “until death do us part” by obtaining a divorce, one is living in a “perpetual state of adultery.” Why should the innocent party in a broken marriage not be allowed to marry again? The ideal of “permanence and exclusivity” was again appealed to and the program closed, leaving the impression that whether a marriage was good or bad, one should try one’s best to “stay in it.”

As a result of the intransigence of most churches’ position on divorce, religious marital counseling has increased in Jamaica. The 13-page 1992 Premarital Counselling Questionnaire used by Family Life Ministries in Kingston includes the following questions:

“Section 6: Sexuality”:

When you think about sexual intercourse does this make you anxious because of what relatives and or friends have told you?

Is there a difference between sex and love? If yes, what is it?

What do you think is the purpose of sex in marriage?

Which books have you read on marriage?

“Section 10: Living and Growing Together”:

Knowing yourself, how do you think you will handle your life reversals? (unemployment, debt, sickness, etc.)

What will you do when you discover that he/she is romantically interested in another person?

What kind of interests do you have in common?

Interestingly, the final section, “12: Family of Origin,” three pages long, is completely devoted to childhood socialization. Based on “Dr. Stanley Watson’s manual, ‘The Healing Family,’ 1989,
responses are sought on a wide variety of topics like control, expression of anger, the making of decisions, affection, and sex roles. In his article, “Why I committed adultery,” Ronald Clarke from this same church organization blamed childhood socialization for the near loss of his marriage:

I was socialised as a boy to never share my feelings, especially my hurts and vulnerability, which was unbecoming of a man. Men were to be tough and crying was frowned upon, so I kept it all inside. . . . Things started to change after marriage. . . . I realised that I was talking less and less and then later it occurred to me that I was sharing less and less of my inside.60

Church interventions now regularly emphasize sexual relations, a topic that would not have been discussed in church years ago. It is noteworthy that, although husbands are chastised for adultery, the onus of healthy marital relations is still placed on wives. In 2006, the Sunday Gleaner’s Outlook Magazine61 reported on “Peace and Love in Marriage (PALM),” a seminar of the Church of God International. In an article entitled, “Cheating in Marriage,” marriage counsellor George Ramocan discussed how “couples are quite capable of cheating each other within the marriage and frequently do.” Ramocan directed his counsel “especially to wives,” who were counseled to refrain from “disciplining their husbands by the act of withholding sex.” “Rather than criticizing, nagging or withholding sex,” they should “do [their] Christian duty.” Men needed to “understand how women think” and women needed “to understand their husbands.”

Individual church ministers have taken the charge further. Former Dancehall62 Queen of Portland, Pentecostal Rev. Carla Dunbar, mentioned in Chapter III, travels around Jamaica telling the story of her life, holding conferences on the sacredness of marriage, and “ministering”

60 Sunday Gleaner, Outlook Magazine, March 26, 2006.
61 June 25, 17.
62 The Jamaican music form that followed reggae in the 1970s, which includes ‘badness’ lyrics and extreme sexiness in styles of dress.
to people’s marriages. Interviewed by Ian Boyne on “Religious Hard Talk” in 2006, she stated that “true, sacred sex” is “not just for procreation but enjoyment” and spoke of sexual frustration on the part of husbands at the prudishness of their wives. She might have been addressing the wives in this study when she declared, “Three months is too long to leave a husband, as it can cause him to go astray. Telephone communications are not enough.” Rev. Winston “Bello” Bell, describing sex as

heavenly, and pure, and wholesome, and mystifyingly wonderful. It is soul engulfing and beautiful, and no marriage can last without it.⑩

speaks directly to the former religious intransigence mentioned earlier:

[I]t is time to remove the backward immature way in which we deal with sex and encourage the church to become more able to handle the subject with a great big serving of objectivity.

**Slavery and Culture**

Chapter II showed how slavery has influenced, and continues to influence, the peculiar family structure of the British Caribbean, including Jamaica. Most respondents in this study agreed that this influence continues. Patterson (1998), however, claiming that conflicts in African American male-female relations are not the result of slavery but of the post-slavery segregation period, seems to indicate that the influence of slavery should now be outgrown. In 1971, Caribbean scholar George Beckford predicted that

Caribbean economy and society can move forward to provide a just existence for its peoples only if the plantation foundations on which the contemporary society rests are completely destroyed;⑪

In 1972 Beckford (1988, 255) continued:

The development problems of plantation economy and society are not intractable in any physical or technical sense. The most intractable problem is the colonized condition of the minds of the people. Until we decolonize the mind, there is little hope that genuine independence can be achieved.

⑩ Page 10.
⑪ Barrow and Reddock 2001, 148-49.
In 2007, Seaga, in his aforementioned article, “Some Shameful Sins of Slavery,” wrote: 65

Every effort should be devoted to the singular task of mobilising whatever is necessary to blot out the remaining intractable sins of slavery which continue to dehumanize the people.

The Jamaican double standard of morality may be seen as one of the “intractable sins of slavery which continues to dehumanize” Jamaicans. However, Bob Marley’s “Redemption Song” advises, “Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery; none but ourselves can free our minds,” yet he too was unfaithful to his wives.

Verene Lazarus-Shepherd, University of West Indies professor, director of UWI’s Institute for Gender and Development Studies and host of the radio program “Talking History” on Nationwide 90 FM, in chairing the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, 66 has called for a “project of true emancipation.” She indicates that the “plantation foundations” mentioned by Beckford (above) still exist:

We only have to pay attention to the social commentary in the lyrics of our musical artistes, listen to the concerns of some of those who call in to the radio talk show programmes, read the daily newspapers, watch the nightly newscasts, visit some of our tourist centers and understand the political critique captured in the newspaper cartoons to understand that the legacy of slavery debate lives on over a century and a half after 1838.

In this light she has undertaken to investigate the Netherlands “Black Pete” (Zwarte Piet) 67 festival as an “outdated racist tradition,” since white people in blackface with red lips are a “throwback to slavery.” 68 This practice may not be as objectionable or “offensive” as the double standard of morality in the Afro-Caribbean, which perhaps should also “not be happening . . . in

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65 Daily Gleaner, February 4, G-3.
66 UN General Assembly Resolution 68/237, dated 23 December 2013, has proclaimed the International Decade for People of African Descent commencing on 1 January 2015 and ending on 31 December 2024, with the theme “People of African Descent: Recognition, Justice and Development.”
67 One of the highlights of St. Nicholas Day celebrations, this White man in costume with blackened face acts as Santa Claus’s helper, playfully giving out treats.
68 Interview on YouTube.
the 21st Century.” Perhaps it should no longer be culturally “normal” for Jamaican wives to accept that their husbands will be unfaithful, while husbands are “sure” that their wives will not.

Culture, however defined, includes a vital characteristic of people's adaptation to their environment. With an ever-changing environment, therefore, cultures are no longer set in stone. As societies modernize and as people everywhere become more aware of each other through processes like migration, cultural practices like female circumcision and the sacrifice of one child when twins are born, have revealed themselves to be discriminatory and just plain cruel. Perhaps it is along these lines that husbands’ in the Afro-Caribbean infidelity should be re-theorized. Slavery has long been abolished and so should the negative practices derived therefrom.
CHAPTER VI

MARRIAGE JAMAICAN STYLE: IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

After all, what is marriage? A regulation of sexual relations, including not merely the physical instincts which this intercourse involves but the feelings of every sort gradually engrafted by civilization on the foundation of physical desire. For among us love is a far more mental than organic fact. A man looks to a woman, not merely to the satisfaction of the sexual impulse.

... Moral reasons, as well as physical needs impel love. Hence, it no longer has the regular, automatic periodicity which it displays in animals. A psychological impulse may awaken it at any time. It is not seasonal. But just because these various inclinations, thus changed, do not directly depend upon organic necessities, social regulation became necessary. They must be restrained by society since the organism has no means of restraining them. This is the function of marriage. It completely regulates the life of passion, and monogamic marriage more strictly than any other. For by forcing a man to attach himself forever to the same woman it assigns a strictly definite object to the need for love, and closes the horizon.

–Durkheim 1951

The field researcher . . . is never quite sure that his latest “finding” is critical or is the final one. More important . . . than “nailing it down” is “linking it up” logically, theoretically, and empirically to other findings or discoveries of his own and others. Then he may measure or test it.”

–Schatzman and Strauss 1973

Introduction

This research project studied the legal marriages of Jamaican couples who have lived transnationally between the United States and Jamaica for more than a decade, sometimes for as long as thirty years. Appendix A shows the outcomes to date of the marriages in the study. The post-interview marital status of the six couples in which both spouses were interviewed is as follows. Two couples are still living transnationally, after 20 and 25 years, respectively. The third couple has found it difficult to adjust to cohabiting again in the United States and lately, after 16 years, the husband has begun to spend longer periods in Jamaica, which may indicate his intention to live apart from his wife again. The fourth couple is retired and living together
happily in Jamaica. The fifth couple was also retired and living together happily in Jamaica until the husband passed on. The sixth couple resumed cohabitation in the United States for a short while, then the wife filed for divorce. This concluding chapter summarizes the study’s findings and suggests directions for future research.

The study aimed to explore the impact of these Jamaican transnational marriages on the couples, their families and the wider society and, in so doing, investigate the nature of legal marriage among Jamaicans and perhaps Afro-Caribbeans as well. Conceived as an ethnography, the study focused on the lived experience of the Jamaican transnational couples, as described in interviews by immigrant wives, left-behind husbands, adult children, and other respondents. Participant observation of Jamaican society provided the cultural context for interviewee responses by enabling the analysis of everyday references to legal marriage in newspaper articles, call-in radio programs, talk shows on radio and television, theatrical performances, literature, song, and casual conversation. This observation also provided additional data since the study’s sample was small.

Though mentioned in Caribbean migration literature, these transnational marriages have until now not been the subject of academic research. In reviewing the literature for this study, I found only three Jamaican marriage “studies,” in sharp contrast to the wealth of research available on American marriage. First, Lorna Goodison’s (1990) short story, “Bella Makes Life,” although fictional, provided a useful account of a Jamaican transnational marriage, especially of the experience of left-behind husband Joseph. Second, Rosemarie Stone’s (2007) brave autobiographical account, No Stone Unturned: The Carl and Rosie Story, although focused on her struggle with HIV/AIDS, offered rare insight into a high-profile Jamaican legal marriage destroyed by husband infidelity. Finally, the only research study, Lisa Douglass’s (1992) The
Power of Sentiment: Love, Hierarchy, and the Jamaican Family Elite, gave a most useful appraisal of the Jamaican upper class which tends to set the tone for social relations, including legal marriage, in Jamaica. Interestingly, Douglass’ work, although published over 20 years ago, came to my attention by chance only four months before the study’s completion, although I have been contemplating this topic for some 15 years. Perhaps the word “elite” in the title has robbed Douglass’s work of the wider attention that it deserves.

In the Jamaican marriages I studied, some wives emigrated alone, with the blessing of their husbands and the stated goal of making a “better life” for their family, while their husbands continued to reside in Jamaica, never emigrating. Other wives emigrated with husbands who soon returned home to Jamaica. Children of these marriages were usually left behind initially with extended kinfolk in Jamaica. Some emigrated later to join their mothers, especially for tertiary education and other opportunities, leaving their fathers behind in Jamaica. In the history of the West Indies, this “stage” migration is normal, dating from when men migrated largely on fixed, short-term, labor contracts and sometimes their families would follow them. The increase of service jobs in the United States having produced a comparable increase in female migration from the Caribbean, as from other areas in the world, Jamaican transnational marriages are probably far more frequent than indicated by the small sample of respondents in this study. As mentioned earlier, however, Jamaicans and other Afro-Caribbean nationals are known to be reluctant to discuss their personal business, so participants for the study were difficult to locate.

Such a migration decision is personal, but spouses encounter structural constraints, albeit differently. Unfriendly immigration laws and practices play a key role in spousal separations when husbands are unable to obtain a visa to travel to the United States to visit their wives and illegal immigrant wives waiting to have their status regularized in the United States dare not
leave the country to visit their left-behind husbands. Many wives come to the United States with green cards sponsored by family members. The Jamaica Overseas Employment Scheme provides fixed-term contracts for nurses, teachers, and hotel workers and they too are often able to obtain sponsorship for a green card at the end of their contracts. Other wives, however, unable to be counted because of their illegal status, enter the United States on visitor visas and end up staying illegally, accepting jobs in people’s homes as domestic helpers and caregivers for children and the elderly. Their only option is to remain in the United States until they can find some way—sponsorship by their employer or amnesty—to regularize their status.

For left-behind husbands, the structural constraints are more subtle. Only one husband in this study seemed to lack the adequate financial resources to procure a visitor visa. More often, husbands hear negative stories of other Jamaican immigrant men’s experiences. They fear the racial discrimination still prevalent in American society, whereby employment prospects may be slimmer for a Black Jamaican man than for a Black Jamaican woman, and the loss of status they may confront on the job and at home when their wives become the principal earners in the family. Whereas Jamaican wives will use a lower-status job to gradually achieve their career goals, Jamaican husbands will seldom leave home to accept a menial job abroad. Although a transnational husband may really miss his wife, he may not deem it worth his while to emigrate with her, preferring his social and cultural life in Jamaica, where moreover he can enjoy certain male privileges, not the least of which is the opportunity to be loved by other women with the tacit approval of Jamaican society. Legal marriage, though considered a serious commitment and a sacred contract, is culturally not a deterrent to infidelity.

The other woman in Jamaica sees an opportunity and seizes it but either does not fully understand, or discounts, the implications of the idealization of legal marriage in Jamaica and the
effects of Jamaican childhood socialization on the husband, the wife, and herself. She may maintain her lengthy relationship with the legally-married husband in the hope that his wife will become so acculturated to U.S. norms that she will seek a divorce. If the other woman relies on the legally-married husband for financial support, she will wait ever more patiently for his divorce.

The Research Questions

My initial research question was what keeps Jamaican transnational marriages intact, when spouses live apart in two different societies for over a decade. Other questions soon arose. Do spouses initially consider this marital arrangement to be just as valid as any other, to later end up with regrets? At what cost to themselves, husbands, and children do Jamaican women leave husbands in Jamaica to “make a better life?” How do these marriages affect others outside the immediate family circle? Who decides when the “better life” has been made? Is the short-term emigration decision worth it in the long run? Are there far-reaching effects that merit examination in order to inform future migration decisions?

How do immigrant wives’ acculturation and increased access to goods and services in the United States affect these transnational marriages? What is the role of the other woman in Jamaica? Is she really content to continue ‘friendin’ with the husband for years, knowing that she has little or nothing to gain and if so, why? Do immigrant wives have male friends or lovers in the United States? How does a transnational couple ‘pick up the pieces’ of their marriage and reunite after so many years, whether abroad or in Jamaica? Why do these marriages not lead inevitably to divorce, but instead most often peter out to a natural end when the husband dies?

Are negative outcomes an innocent, unforeseen casualty of the emigration decision, or do they reflect a wife’s conscious or unconscious desire to rid herself of the unequal division of
household labor and double standard of morality that is associated with marriage in Jamaica, without having to file for legal separation or divorce? Do these transnational marriages say something important about Jamaican attitudes to legal marriage in general, and are there gender differences in these attitudes? Are marriage outcomes predictable in some way? By being too quick to espouse grand theories like the ‘push-pull’ theory, have scholars failed to grasp important aspects of the individual life course that might give greater meaning to the study of migration?

**Findings**

Security was probably the important factor in the maintenance of these transnational marriages. Left-behind husbands remained married, not only because they had not quarreled with their wives, but also to retain their status as married men and not to have to commit to other women with whom they might become involved in Jamaica. Marriage is a status marker for both men and women in Jamaica: for a man, it tells society, especially his employer, that he is mature and responsible for ‘doing the right thing’; for a woman, it means that she has been ‘chosen’ and is thus more highly favored than her unmarried sisters. Immigrant wives were content to have a husband to visit in Jamaica whose financial holdings were securely theirs, without having to endure on a daily basis the unequal division of household labor and husband infidelity.

These two features of Jamaican legal marriage were the prime components of immigrant wives’ dissatisfaction before leaving for the United States and some wives in this study had used emigration to rid themselves of both. Most wives in this study were willing to forgive left-behind husbands’ infidelity because they were an ocean away and unless husbands overstepped the unstated “line.” Both husbands and wives “did not believe in” divorce but wives considered “disrespect” and husbands’ mismanagement of hard-earned remittances to be reasonable
grounds. This study was unable to ascertain whether immigrant wives had male friends or lovers, as only one other man was located and the transnational wife who declared that she had been unfaithful did not, at the time of the interview, have a steady male “friend.” The impression gained from responses was that wives were either too busy working or taking care of children and grandchildren, or they had reached a stage in their life course when sexual intimacy was no longer as important as before. It was interesting that husbands were not in the least concerned about their wife’s sexual needs because they “knew” that their wives had been socialized to be faithful.

Time and life-course stages played an important part in the evolution of these transnational marriages. Some husbands in the study did not set out to be unfaithful but time and opportunity allowed it to happen. Unlike the case of living-apart together (LAT) marriages, separate homes were not among these couples’ stated marriage goals. Migration was seen as an expedient measure and the living-apart experience was supposed to last no more than five years. Nevertheless over time older immigrant wives became increasingly involved with grandchildren, and in some instances aging parents, living in the United States and/or they grew to depend on senior citizen benefits not available in Jamaica. Younger transnational wives found that, in the “land of opportunity,” there were ever more goals, especially educational ones, to achieve. Moreover, marriage expectations seemed to grow increasingly gendered with age. Older husbands left behind in Jamaica continued to esteem sexual intimacy as an integral part of their lives, while older immigrant wives in the United States did not. The latter tended to drown their sexual desires in work, grandchildren, or other activities. Some increased involvement in their churches.
Transnational spouses seemed more influenced by the traditionally religious functions of marriage, with the husband as provider and protector and the wife as “helpmate,” than with the notions of romantic love that Western marriage and their adult children have come to embrace. In this regard, emigrant wives who were earning more in the United States than their husbands in Jamaica still considered their husbands to be the head of their families. Wives experienced no significant role change because they had always “helped” their husband and family. On the other hand, some husbands in Jamaica experienced role anxiety when they no longer felt needed for provision or protection. How spouses managed the changes produced by time and the life course was a key factor in their marriage outcomes.

The surprise finding in this study was that husbands left behind in Jamaica seemed perfectly content, in their own society with friends, relations and sometimes other women, until their health failed, or immigrant wives threatened them with legal separation or divorce. In Jamaica domestic helpers, or other women, or a combination of both, provided for their basic needs. On the other hand, husbands who finally emigrated to please their wives were extremely unhappy when their marriages failed because they felt “stuck” in the United States and would have preferred to be “back home.”

Many immigrant wives in this study also seemed “stuck,” undecided how to proceed. Unlike the wife who returned home to Jamaica at the age of 50, wives seemed unclear as to when their goals had been sufficiently achieved. While missing the companionship of their spouses, they had become accustomed to the American way of life. They were deterred from return migration to Jamaica by the prevalence of crime and the inaccessibility of good healthcare and other benefits in Jamaica.¹ Le Espiritu (2003, 145, 139), writing of the Philippines—the “largest

supplier of health professionals” to the United States–points out that “prolonged family separation can spawn marital conflict, as wives hold their husbands responsible for their overburdened lives.” Some Jamaican transnational wives were not happy to continue living in the United States and the annual one or two visits per year to Jamaica were important to keep them going. ‘Tourists’ in their own country, they felt important and accomplished. In the United States they were bothered by the cold and loneliness, having discovered in their later years that the companionship of adult children and grandchildren did not compensate for the lack of a spouse. But a caring spouse, my respondents were quick to add: they would rather be un-companioned than ill-companioned. Wives feared re-marriage, especially to another Afro-Caribbean national, as they were not anxious for ‘more of the same’ and marriage held no guarantees. They were quite determined not to return to the status quo of the unequal division of household labor and the double standard of morality in Jamaica.

Outcomes

Marriage outcomes depended largely on how the living apart experience had been managed. It was interesting that, no matter the outcome, the majority of spouses did not regret the emigration decision. Wives had self-actualized; children had benefited; husbands had been happy to stay at home. Some wives were, however, ambivalent: they had self-actualized but had in essence lost their marriages through emigration. Neither wives nor husbands seemed to know when or how their living-apart marriages would end: the one wife who decided at age 50 that she had “made it” and was overjoyed to have returned to Jamaica and her husband was exceptional. There were far-reaching effects of a short-term decision turned long-term situation, and many spouses wished that they could have better foreseen how their marriages would evolve. Some
wives, and one husband, expressed regret that with the changed circumstances they had married
the spouses that they had.

Most parents announced that they did not think their children had been affected by their
marriage, and adult children did not report any adverse effects. However, all the study’s adult
children declared that they would not repeat their parents' marital experience. The younger they
were and the more time spent in the United States, the more they thought that their parents'
marrige was a sham and should be discontinued. It was unclear whether this was because of
acculturation to U.S. norms or because they are younger than their parents and attitudes in
Jamaica are changing. The daughter who thought her parents’ transnational marriage was “OK”
admitted later in the interview that she was “scared” of marriage and neither she nor her sister is
married. She has been living together with “a special someone” for ten years, has provided for
herself financially, and reports that she is happy this way. One daughter did regret her mother’s
decision to emigrate, as she did not care for life in the United States and would have preferred to
remain in Jamaica.

Spouses who eventually resumed cohabitation in Jamaica seemed happier than those who
resumed cohabitation in the United States because it seems that Jamaican men really prefer
living in Jamaica. Reuniting in the United States was fraught with difficulties. Husbands who
migrated in later life were less open to change than if they had migrated initially; they found
American society unfamiliar, unwelcoming, and unpleasant. They missed out on their children’s
rites of passage and felt unconnected to them as young adults; wives accustomed to the ‘rat race’
of American life were unwilling or unable to slow down. An adult daughter in the study reported
that, when her father migrated to the United States in his 60s, his friends were either dead or
busy. He was only too happy to return to Jamaica.
Only two immigrant wives in the study did not long to be “back home” in Jamaica. Those wives who were able to ‘pick up the pieces’ in Jamaica lived ‘happily ever after’ from the funds earned from migration. They had shored up the family’s living conditions with their remittances and were receiving a pension in U.S. currency and were back with their husbands. American dollars go far in Jamaica (the current exchange rate is US$1 = J$112.55) and the slower pace of life in Jamaica is conducive to retirement (absent the crime and problematic healthcare services). The immigrant wife also returns with increased status because she has lived abroad.

**Future Research Directions**

Chapters III (responses) and IV (analysis) of this study are purposely detailed to provoke further discussion and research, especially because the sample used in this research study was small. The questionnaires used to guide the interviews are also attached as Appendix B for amendment to aid future investigation. For example, when a husband replied that he had missed his wife, it would have been interesting to find out if he had ever admitted this to her. Questions on childhood socialization could also be reworked to evoke responses concerning spouses’ own upbringing, rather than their experience of their parents’ marriages. Outcomes of these Jamaican transnational marriages (Appendix A) will continue to vary. Although perhaps unforeseen at the time of emigration, they may not be totally unforeseeable. Had the couples in this study been aware of all the ramifications of their migration decision—the importance of the pre-migration state of the marriage, the possible cultural shift in mores, and the effects of the passage of time over the life course—they may have been in greater control of their marriage outcomes.

With regard to Jamaican and Afro-Caribbean *migration*, it would also be interesting to uncover whether the need for liberation and self-actualization is not sometimes a more powerful
motivator for women than the economic push-pull factors proclaimed in migration literature. What can be done to encourage wives who want to return to their husbands but are afraid to return to Jamaica to ‘call it quits’ and go home? Published interviews of returned residents, especially wives, regarding the resettling process, including government provisions and activities for senior citizens, would certainly be helpful.

Bauer and Thompson (2006, 213), in classifying the Jamaican transnational families as essentially a modern form developed in the context of a globalizing economy, sucking in labour and sending out goods and money from one continent to another, and increasingly tightly linked by cheap transport and by modern communication technology note the “dangers . . . for older men, who may end their lives in a loneliness inconceivable in their earlier years so full of people.” Yet in this study the older immigrant women seem headed for more loneliness than the older men, unless they remain close to their children and grandchildren. With regard to marriage, more research is needed to examine whether Jamaican and Afro-Caribbean immigrant wives who leave their husbands behind really sublimate their sexuality completely in their work. How many of them form friendships with men, and how intimate do these friendships become? The only other man interviewed became so saddened by his recollections, that I did not ask as many questions as I wanted to and probably should have. Moreover, the interview took place at his home and I needed to be respectful of his wife’s presence, even if she was not in the interview room. More research in general is necessary to effect improvement in Jamaican coupling relationships, including legal marriages, especially with regard to fidelity and life course stages. Companionship, for example, seems high on the list of wives’ expectations from the start but does not seem to enter husbands’ lists until they are

\[\text{2 Ibid.}\]
much older, hence the salience of the “YG phenomenon” in Jamaica and the disappointment of some wives in this study.

More research would also be welcome on the effects of Jamaican and Afro-Caribbean childhood socialization on gender and how gendering is sustained intergenerationally. The adult children in this study claimed no negative aspects from their parents’ marriages but one might follow these children into their own marriages to confirm or deny these results. Despite what they claimed, some of these adult children had married later than their peers; one declared a lack of interest in marriage; and one U.S.-resident adult daughter whose left-behind father rated her marriage at 9 out of a possible 10 was divorced shortly thereafter.

Conclusion

The transnational marriages of Jamaican wives who emigrate and leave their husbands behind certainly proved worthy of investigation. Results proved far more nuanced than initially foreseen and showed that these marriages can have far-reaching effects beyond the immediate family circle. Interesting patterns were revealed with regard to family dynamics, gender norms and Jamaican and Afro-Caribbean culture, and the interplay of the public and personal in migration patterns. It is hoped that the insights provided in this study will serve not only to prevent the negative consequences of transnational marriages, but also to encourage ways of improving Jamaican, and perhaps Afro-Caribbean man-woman relationships in general. A window has been opened on the understanding of marriage Jamaica-style; it is hoped that other scholars will open a door.
APPENDIX A

OUTCOMES OF COUPLES SURVEYED

Key:

TJ Together in Jamaica (2)
TUSA Together in UNITED STATES (4)
SJ Separated in Jamaica (1)
WDIV Wife Initiated Divorce (2)
HDIV Husband Initiated Divorce (2)
LA Living Apart Still (6)
U Unknown (5)
WDEC Wife Deceased (1)
HDEC Husband Deceased (7)
BDEC Both Deceased (2)

Note:

1. Some couples are represented twice, since spouses were still living apart when the marriage dissolved in death.

2. Life expectancy at birth in Jamaica is: male, 71; female, 75 (Jamaica Demographics Profile 2013, indexmundi.com). U.S. projections for 2010 were: male, 75; female, 80 (census.gov).
APPENDIX B

THE QUESTIONNAIRES/INTERVIEW GUIDES

WIVES

How long have you been married?
How long did you live with your husband before you got married?
Can you tell me what made you decide to get married when you did?
How old were you?
How old was your husband?
How did you think your life would change when you got married?

Goals

What were your goals for your marriage?
Do you think your husband had similar goals?
Which of your goals have you achieved?
How have you achieved them?
Which of these goals have you not achieved?
Why do you think you have not achieved them?

Satisfaction

On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the highest, how would you rate your overall satisfaction with your marriage?
In what year of your marriage were you most satisfied? Why?
In what year of your marriage were you least satisfied? Why?

Migration

How long have you been in the U.S. without your husband?
When did you leave Jamaica for the U.S.?
Why did you leave?

Who arrived at the decision for you to leave?

Who decided that your husband would stay behind in Jamaica? Why?

Did you want him to migrate with you? If not, why not?

How do you feel about your husband living in Jamaica while you are living away?

**Communication**

How often do you visit Jamaica?

How long do you stay when you go?

Describe a typical visit to your husband in Jamaica.

How often does your husband visit you in the U.S.?

How long does he stay when he comes?

Describe a typical visit when your husband comes to the U.S. to visit you.

How do you and your husband interact when you are not with each other? (phone calls, letters, email, cards, money transfers)

**The Future**

Do you plan to return to live with your husband in Jamaica? If so, when? If not, why not?

Would you like your husband to come and live with you in the U.S.? Why/why not?

If not, was there a time when you wanted him to come? If so, why have you changed your mind?

**Children**

Are there children from your marriage? How many, what gender, how old?

How old were they when you left Jamaica?

Did they migrate with you or remain in Jamaica?

Who took care of them, if they remained?

Are there any ‘outside’ children of the marriage? How many, what gender, how old?
Whose children are they?

Where does each child from the marriage live?

Which children from the marriage are themselves married?

On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the highest, how would you rate what you perceive as the success of each child’s marriage?

How do you think your children have been affected by your marriage?

Will you find out if any of your children would be willing to talk to me? May I call you in a week or two for the contact number?

Sexuality

Did you have a satisfying sexual relationship with your husband when you were living together in Jamaica?

When you left, did you miss him sexually?

When you and your husband are apart, what do you do about your sexuality?

What do you think your husband does about his?

On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the highest, how would you rate your sexual satisfaction with your husband: (a) before you migrated; (b) the most recent time you were together?

Fidelity

Have you been faithful to your marriage vows?

Would you tell me if you have not? If not, why not?

Do you think your husband has been faithful to his marriage vows?

Would you be upset if you found out that he has not? Why? Why not?

How upset do you think your husband would be if he found out that you had been unfaithful?

In Retrospect/Reflections on Marriage

If you had it to do all over again, how would you like your marriage to be?

Do you think the worldview of marriage has changed? If so, how?
Do you think the Jamaican view of marriage has changed? If so, how?

What do you think of the current ‘young girl (YG)’ phenomenon, where much older men are marrying much younger girls?

How new is this phenomenon in Jamaican society?


What, do you think, are some particularly Jamaican ideas about marriage?

Why do you think so many Jamaican couples live together instead of getting married?

Why do you think some Jamaican couples live together for a long time and then get married?

**Childhood Socialization**

How do you think your childhood experiences and the attitudes of your parents, or the person/people who raise you—parent(s), grandparent(s), aunt(s), uncle(s)—have affected your opinions on (a) marriage; (b) divorce?

What was the occupation and religion of the person/people who raised you?

What were their moral attitudes, especially their views on (a) enjoyment and play; (b) sex?

Were the people who raised you married, and were they openly affectionate to each other?

How did they express their affection for each other?

How successful would you rate their marriage, both socially and sexually?

What kind of attitude to sex do you think you acquired from your childhood?

Is there a gap between what you learned in childhood and what you ended up doing?

If so, why? Is it just because ‘times have changed’?

**Divorce**

What are your personal views on divorce?

Where do you think you got these views from?

How do you think your husband views divorce?
What do you think the ‘average Jamaican’ thinks about divorce?

In your opinion, how can we know what the average Jamaican thinks about anything? (Letters to the Editor, radio call-in shows, plays, reggae music lyrics)

**Additional Questions/Comments**

How do you see the future of your marriage?

If you had the choice to do it all over again, would you marry the same man if you knew you would be separated for a long time?

Is there anything I neglected to ask you that you want to tell me, or think it important for me to know?
HUSBANDS

How long have you been married?

How long did you live with your wife before you got married?

Can you tell me what made you decide to get married when you did?

How old were you?

How old was your wife?

How did you think your life would change when you got married?

Goals

What were your goals for your marriage?

Do you think your wife had similar goals?

Which of your goals have you achieved?

How have you achieved them?

Which of these goals have you not achieved?

Why do you think you have not achieved them?

Satisfaction

On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the highest, how would you rate your overall satisfaction with your marriage?

In what year of your marriage were you most satisfied? Why?

In what year of your marriage were you least satisfied? Why?

Migration

Are you happy that your wife migrated? Why/why not?

When did your wife leave Jamaica?

How did you feel about her leaving?

Why did she go?
Who arrived at the decision for your wife to leave?

Who decided that you would stay behind in Jamaica? Why?

Did you want to migrate with your wife? If not, why not?

**Communication**

How often do you visit the U.S.?

How long do you stay when you go?

Describe a typical visit with your wife in the U.S.

How often does your wife visit you in Jamaica?

How long does she stay when she comes?

Describe a typical visit when your wife comes to Jamaica to visit you.

How do you and your wife interact when you are not with each other? (phone calls, letters, email, cards, money transfers)

**The Future**

Do you plan to join your wife in the U.S.? If so, when? If not, why not?

Would you like your wife to return to live with you in Jamaica? Why/why not?

**Children**

Are there children from your marriage? How many, what gender, how old?

How old were they when your wife left Jamaica?

Did they go with her or remain in Jamaica?

Who took care of them, if they remained?

Are there any ‘outside’ children of the marriage? How many, what gender, how old?

Whose children are they?

Where does each child from the marriage live?
Which children from the marriage are themselves married?

On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the highest, how would you rate what you perceive as the success of each child’s marriage?

How do you think your children have been affected by your marriage?

Will you find out if any of your children would be willing to talk to me? May I call you in a week or two for the contact number?

**Sexuality**

Did you have a satisfying sexual relationship with your wife when you were living together in Jamaica?

When she left, did you miss her sexually?

When you and your wife are apart, what do you do about your sexuality?

What do you think your wife does about hers?

On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the highest, how would you rate your sexual satisfaction with your wife: (a) before she migrated; (b) the most recent time you were together?

**Fidelity**

Have you been faithful to your marriage vows?

Would you tell me if you have not? If not, why not?

Do you think your wife has been faithful to her marriage vows?

Would you be upset if you found out that she has not? Why? Why not?

How upset do you think your wife would be if she found out that you had been unfaithful?

**In Retrospect/Reflections on Marriage**

If you had it to do all over again, how would you like your marriage to be?

Do you think the worldview of marriage has changed? If so, how?

Do you think the Jamaican view of marriage has changed? If so, how?

What do you think of the current ‘young girl (YG)’ phenomenon, where much older men are marrying much younger girls?
How new is this phenomenon in Jamaican society?


What, do you think, are some particularly Jamaican ideas about marriage?

Why do you think so many Jamaican couples live together instead of getting married?

Why do you think some Jamaican couples live together for a long time and then get married?

**Childhood Socialization**

How do you think your childhood experiences and the attitudes of your parents, or the person/people who raise you—parent(s), grandparent(s), aunt(s), uncle(s)—have affected your opinions on (a) marriage; (b) divorce?

What was the occupation and religion of the person/people who raised you?

What were their moral attitudes, especially their views on (a) enjoyment and play; (b) sex?

Were the people who raised you married, and were they openly affectionate to each other?

How did they express their affection for each other?

How successful would you rate their marriage, both socially and sexually?

What kind of attitude to sex do you think you acquired from your childhood?

Is there a gap between what you learned in childhood and what you ended up doing? If so, why? Is it just because ‘times have changed’?

**Divorce**

What are your personal views on divorce?

Where do you think you got these views from?

How do you think your wife views divorce?

What do you think the ‘average Jamaican’ thinks about divorce?

In your opinion, how can we know what the average Jamaican thinks about anything? (Letters to the Editor, radio call-in shows, plays, reggae music lyrics)
**Additional Questions/Comments**

How do you see the future of your marriage?

If you had the choice to do it all over again, would you marry the same woman if you knew you would be separated for a long time?

Is there anything I neglected to ask you that you want to tell me, or think it important for me to know?
ADULT CHILDREN (18+)

Migration

How old are you?

How old were you when your mother migrated?

Whom did you live with after she left?

If you didn’t migrate at the same time with her, when did you migrate?

If you didn’t migrate at all, why didn’t you?

Marriage

What are your views of marriage?

Are you, or have you been, married?

For how long?

On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the highest, how would you rate your overall satisfaction with your marriage?

What do you think about your parents’ marriage?

In your opinion, do your parents really have a marriage? Why/why not?

How do you think your parents’ marriage has affected you?

If you had the power, would you change the present living arrangement of your parents? If yes, how and why? If no, why not?

Do you think Jamaicans and Americans hold different views on marriage? Explain your response.

What are your thoughts on divorce?

Would you live transnationally like your parents? Why/why not?

Is there anything I neglected to ask that you want to tell me, or think it important for me to know?
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