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Caribbean Family Structure: Past Research and Recent Evidence from the WFS on Matrifocality

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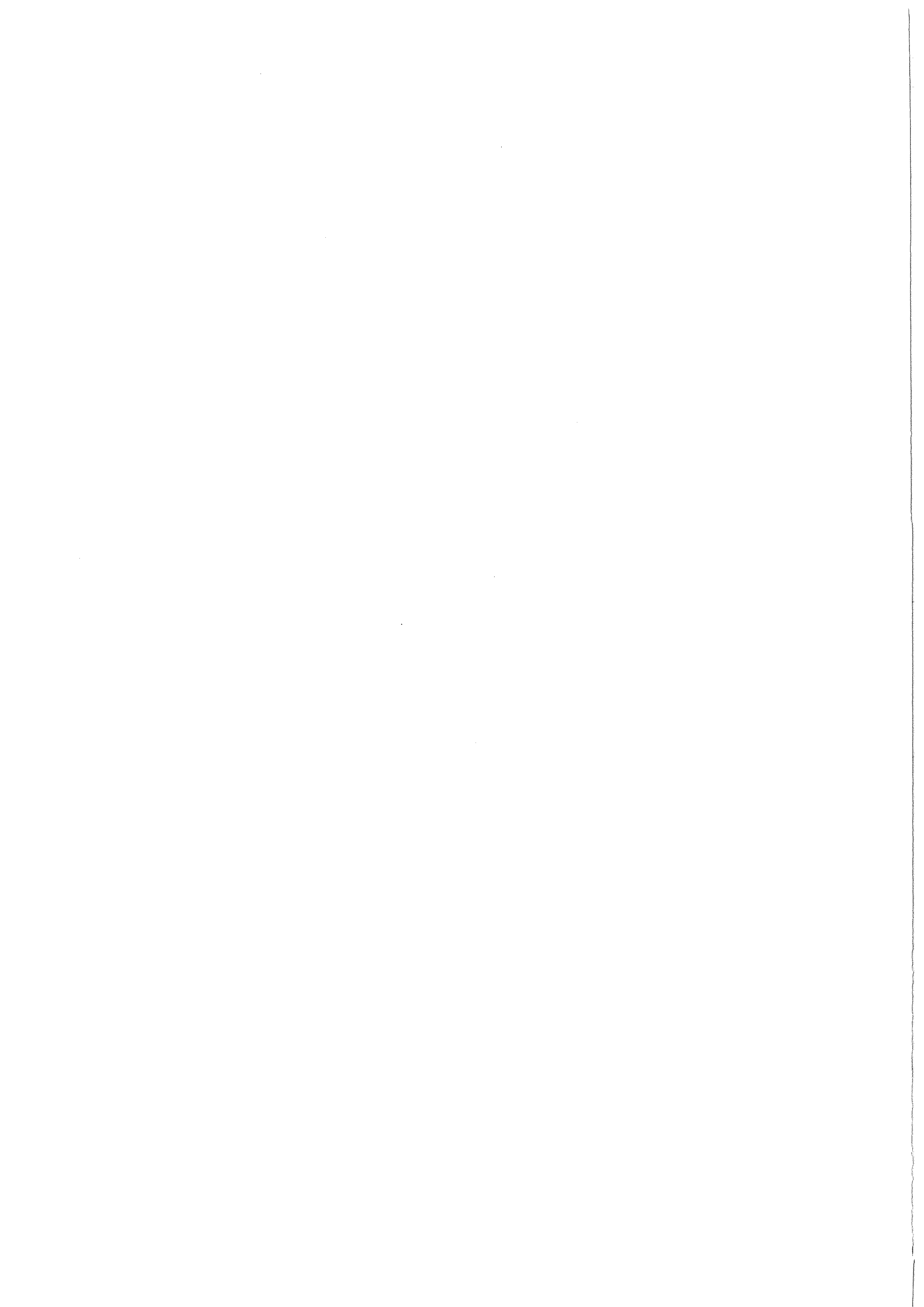

1 Introduction

Sociological and anthropological debates on Caribbean family patterns began in 1939, when Franklin Frazier published his major work, *The Negro Family in the United States*, while at almost the same time Herskovitz proposed a completely different view in his books based on field studies in Haiti and Trinidad (1937, 1941, 1947). According to Frazier, family patterns among American Negroes could not be understood without taking into account the heritage of slavery, whereas Herskovitz stressed the persistence and adaptation of social and cultural patterns of African origin.

The controversy did not remain confined to scholarly circles in the political context of the 1950s, in particular because of the growing concern with social problems on the part of political movements in favour of decolonization. At a time when the social welfare of the lower classes was being stressed, the Jamaican illegitimacy rate, which peaked at 70 per cent in the early 1940s, raised a fundamental issue: 'Was this evidence of massive social disorganisation, or was there something wrong with a view that measured "legitimacy" according to "English" or "upper-class" standards?' (R.T. Smith 1963: 26). As early as 1944–45, Lady Huggins, the wife of the Governor of Jamaica, initiated the 'Mass Marriage Movement', following a Parliamentary Royal Commission, whose report had recommended in 1938 that a 'campaign against the social, moral and economic evils of promiscuity' should be organized. The Mass Marriage Movement boosted the marriage rate from 4.44 per thousand in 1943 to 5.82 per thousand in 1946, but by 1951 its failure was obvious, as nuptiality and illegitimacy had returned to their earlier levels (M.G. Smith 1966: v).

Soon after the Second World War, various organizations, such as the Agency for Colonial Development and Welfare and the Colonial Social Science Research Council, sponsored studies aimed at gathering factual data on Jamaican family patterns. It is not therefore surprising that the 1950s and 1960s studies of 'deviant' and 'disorganized' Caribbean family patterns heavily stressed the socio-economic context, the best-known examples being two major monographs published in 1957 (E. Clarke's *My Mother who Fathered me*) and 1960 (J. Blake's *Family Structure in Jamaica*), while Henriques attempted to use census figures to assess the frequency of families in which illegitimacy was only one aspect of a family structure characterized by the absence of a stable male partner (Henriques 1953: 105–114).

The debate was focused on family structure as soon as anthropologists entered the lists. In his major book, *The Negro Family in British Guiana*, R.T. Smith argued that illegitimacy, the strength of the mother–child bond and the secondary role of male partners had resulted in a new family form, the so-called matrifocal family. Several factors explain the central place occupied by this concept in the anthropological and sociological literature of the 1950s onwards.

First, the weakness of male roles was consistent with union patterns characterized by the frequency of common-law unions, especially in so far as some of them were unstable ('visiting' unions in the English-speaking Caribbean islands, 'ami' in Guadeloupe and Martinique, 'rinmin', 'vivavek' and even 'plasaj' in Haiti). Should a pregnancy occur, a woman involved in such union would be abandoned by her partner.

Historical arguments reinforced demographic data. During slavery, marriage was legally forbidden to slaves, women were sexually exploited by their owner, and values and norms of the African societies had collapsed. Men, having lost all prestige, could only behave in an 'irresponsible' manner. All these elements favoured the shaping of a family form centred on the maternal bond, and despite the abolition of slavery, the persistence of these patterns was easily explained by the dependency of freed slaves upon the plantation system, and more generally by poverty.

This brief and superficial account of the main interpretations of Caribbean family patterns shows how complex is the debate and suggests that the demographer has a difficult task. The arguments put forward being historical, anthropological, sociological and psychological, the demographic approach seems excessively narrow because it only tackles the statistical side of the problem. For instance, a man may be reported as head of the household to the census enumerator, because of his economic role as breadwinner, although his female partner, whether married or common-law, is the real head from a psychological and sociological point of view. But even so, the statistical approach is useful since the psychosociological arguments, and especially the emphasis laid upon the mother–child relationship, underestimate the economic contribution of the father, which is part of the family dynamics.

The first part of this paper will review the main sociological and psychological arguments. Next, statistical data will be used to crosscheck sociological generalization and to assess the validity of certain ethnographic monographs. In the third and fourth parts historical arguments will be involved to try to answer a fundamental question: is matrifocality the necessary product of slavery or must post-slavery factors be taken into account?

2 Sociological and Anthropological Arguments

2.1 SLAVERY

In the case of Jamaica, the consequences of slavery on mating and family patterns of the slave populations have been described by Patterson (1967). In his chapter on the socialization and personality structure of the slave, he asserts that because of slavery all forms of social control of sexual behaviour disappeared and the institution of marriage, whether European or African, disintegrated (Patterson 1967: 159). Fifteen years earlier, in a paper called 'The Social Structure in the British Caribbean', M.G. Smith held the view that 'marriage as a legal institution had no place in a slave society' (1953: 71). At first, the arguments are not quite similar, since Smith does not seem to generalize to all forms of unions, whether legitimate or common-law. However, he goes on to say that 'mating of slaves was typically unstable' (ibid., see also Henriques 1953: 104).

At the heart of the argument lies the belief that stability of mating patterns and therefore of family structures was impossible because of slavery. Of course marriage was legally impossible, because of the contradiction between the right of property and the rights of the individual, but apart from this purely legal factor, European marriage could not exist as an institution. African origins, and especially polygamy, in so far as they survived into the period of slavery, did not favour this form of marriage. But the dispersal of sold slaves and the random gatherings of various ethnic groups on each plantation did not even allow the survival of common customs. More convincingly, the slave–master relationship is regarded as the main cause of the promiscuous mating of slaves. In the case of Jamaica, the unstable mating of slaves is attributed to the exceptionally high degree of disintegration of the white community in which the dearth of women and the lack of moral sanctions 'led to a ruthless exploitation of the female slave' (Patterson 1967: 159; also Lowenthal 1972: 11–12). The same factor is quoted in Cuba, where throughout the 19th century white men had to choose a coloured partner, or would otherwise remain bachelors. But these relationships were marriages only in the exceptional case; between 1805 and 1881, Martinez-Alier did not find a single interracial marriage in the registers of the Province of Santa Maria del Rosario, and only two in that of Regala (Martinez-Alier 1974: 57–63).

According to Patterson, five basic types of associations characterized the Jamaican Society: prostitution, unstable unions, stable unions, multiple associations, and monogamous associations which were sometimes made legal (1967: 160). Prostitution, according to contemporaries, was frequent on the plantation estates, but even more so in towns. The most frequent type of association, especially among young adults, were the unstable unions. However, they could become more stable among older slaves, notably if their economic condition improved. Men would become involved in a 'synchronic quasi-polygamy', using the manpower provided by their temporary common-law wives to exploit their parcels of land or to market their produce. It should be noted that nowadays in Haiti 'plasaj' unions perform the same economic function: a peasant 'places' his common-law partners on remote parcels of land which they cultivate. Plasaj began in the 19th century, because the law of marriage of 1805 was never enforced (Allman 1980: 17–18; Bastien 1961: 503). On the other hand, according to Patterson, the mating pattern of the woman was more 'sequential': because of a turnover of partners, she bore and kept children of several fathers.

Hence the second major consequence of slavery: because of her 'sequential quasi-polyandry', the mother played a central part in the family whereas fathers and/or partners remained marginal. The life cycle of the slave woman started with very early sporadic sexual relationships which were sometimes a form of prostitution, especially in towns. Then she would become the temporary partner of a richer and older slave, or of one or several younger men, both forms of partnerships sometimes being simultaneous. Then she became the 'wife' of one man only, although this partnership remained fragile. Getting older and having to care for several children born of previous partners, she would settle with an older man in a monogamous union, while her partner would have renounced his polygynous behaviour. According to Patterson, the last stage was that of matriarchy, when the husband died (1967: 165–167). However, during the last two stages, the man could play only a marginal role, since the children living in the household were not his, whereas his own children lived with their mothers. Two further arguments explain why the male partner was marginal: first, there was no sexual division of labour on the estates, which devalued the labour of the man. In a commune of Martinique studied by Debien, women were frequent among the 'nègres de terres' not only because men performed some crafts (woodwork, stables), but also because of the African tradition of women working in the fields (Debien 1960: 20–21; the period studied is 1746–1788). The second factor was the superiority gained by a woman as a common-law partner of the master or of his foreman. As the saying went, 'Better be the mistress of a White than the wife of a Negro'.

For all these reasons, the woman–mother was 'the sole permanent element in the slave family' (M.G. Smith 1953: 72).

Although very persuasive, these sociological generalizations raise some problems for the demographer. First of all, statistical evidence is missing: when Patterson

describes the stages of the life cycle of the slave woman, he does not provide any figures. Fortunately, recent historical work has attempted to assess Patterson's contribution (Higman 1970). Secondly, even if reliable data were gathered, are they of any use in understanding the mating patterns of today, one and a half centuries after emancipation?

We shall deal later with the first problem. Let us briefly recall arguments put forward to explain why these patterns survived. A simple legal measure could not transform the living conditions of the slaves: everything depended upon economic freedom for former slaves from the estates. Where land was scarce and expensive, the plantation economy remained almost unchanged; where the slaves were not compelled to sell their labour and could settle as free-holders, the estates were threatened. Hence the importation of East-Indians in Trinidad, Jamaica and Guyana, whereas in Barbados and St Kitts scarcity of land allowed the planters to maintain their economic control. In Barbados for instance, where the price of an acre of land ranged between £60 and £200 during the 1840s, 25 per cent of the population was still employed on the estates in 1844 (40 per cent in Antigua). In Jamaica, where the acre of land was worth £4 to £20 at the same period, the number of freeholders grew from 2000 in 1838 to 27 369 in 1845 and was close to 50 000 in 1861. In Guyana, 15 906 freed slaves had settled on 4506 acres in 1842; figures for 1848 are 40 000 and 17 000, and in 1851, 46 368 persons lived in villages which did not exist before emancipation (Bolland 1981: 597–599; Rivière 1972: 19; Moohr 1972: 597).

A second and more sociological reason accounts for the survival of earlier mating patterns. The choice between marriage and a common-law union was supposedly free, but in fact the overall social and economic context, especially family disintegration, poverty and cultural patterns, reduced freedom to virtually nothing (R.T. Smith 1963: 27). According to Henriques, 'The evidence seems to suggest that the direct encouragement of promiscuity by the planters was sufficient to establish a cultural pattern which has persisted to the present day' (1953: 27).

This view echoes the value judgment expressed by a 19th century observer: 'Over their children it is obvious that they could have no authority resembling that which parents in a free country possess: they could only leave them the same wretched inheritance which they received from their ancestors. Hence those who have children are careless in respect to the habits they form, and the lives they lead. They know they can never sink lower in the scale of society than they already find themselves placed, and they have no hope of rising. A regular line of orderly conduct may save them from the lash but it can effect no radical change in their condition' (as quoted by R.T. Smith 1963: 28). These lines, written in the 1820s, long before the abolition of slavery, could very well describe attitudes and behaviour prevailing in the later decades.

As R.T. Smith observed, the emphasis laid upon economic factors opened new avenues for research: mating behaviour could be interpreted either along historical lines, or in view of the consequences of poverty on family structures. As noted above, research in the 1950s and 1960s focused on lower-class social groups, the most authoritative studies being those of Clarke and Blake. This partly explains why these Caribbean patterns were regarded as self-evidently inherited from the era of slavery. Only recently has historical work questioned the soundness of this opinion, and it should be noted that the same issue is being raised with regard to family structures in the southern part of the United States.

2.2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC ARGUMENTS

It is beyond the scope of this paper to review the sociological and anthropological literature on the Caribbean family. It is however worth recalling some of the factors which helped in perpetuating the instability of unions, and in shaping specifically Caribbean family patterns.[1]

The socialization of Jamaican boys in the 1950s is regarded as different from that of girls, the latter being much more controlled by their parents (Davenport 1961: 438; Clarke 1966: 98; Blake 1961: 62). As Blake noted, this difference originates a vicious circle: lower-class Jamaicans 'guard their daughters against the depredations of other parents' sons, all the while exerting little pressure on their own sons to respect other parents' daughters' (1961: 68). In Puerto Rico, Stycos also noted the potential conflict between 'machismo' and the 'complex of virginity' (Stycos 1955: 37–86). As a result of this pattern of confinement, Jamaican adolescent girls in the 1950s were almost totally ignorant about sex and contraception and were thus at risk of early and unwanted pregnancies. Blake also described the reasons why lower-class Jamaicans failed to efficiently control their daughters: the economic necessity to put them to work, contacts with schoolboys, childhood dispersal to relatives and friends, and of course family disintegration (Blake 1961: 81–86). Should a pregnancy occur, and with no social pressure being exerted upon the male, parents were likely to take care of the young girl and of her baby to be born. Clarke observed that after a somewhat violent reprobation of the girl's behaviour sometimes followed by her rejection from the house because of the shame she caused to the family reputation, the mother finally reintegrated her pregnant daughter into the house (1966: 98–99). And as marriage was preferred to a common-law union for several reasons (social prestige, greater economic aid given by a husband than by a common-law partner), pregnant girls preferred to stay at their mothers' home and wait for marriage (Blake 1961: 18–19, 124–127, 157).

These arguments, which stress the consequences of poverty, are far more convincing than psychological generalizations about the desire of young girls to prove their fecundity and theories about this attitude being socially accepted. As Blake put it, there is no 'intense social pressure to produce children outside of any insti-

[1] Some review articles are useful: R.T. Smith (1963); Schlesinger (1968a, 1968b); Henry and Wilson (1975). Papers by Davenport, Cumper, M.G. Smith Wilson, and Mintz can be found in a special issue of *Social and Economic Studies*, devoted to a seminar on Caribbean social organization (December 1961, vol 10 no 4).

tutionalized context' (1961: 98). She never observed such a pressure, which would moreover be inconsistent with the desire for marriage. In her sample, 60 per cent of the interviewed women (80 per cent of the men) believed that finding a permanent mate was more difficult for a woman having children from previous unions (1961: 100).

2.3 MATRIFOCALITY

Studies of matrifocality generally mix two approaches: relational matrifocality, which usually refers to the strength of the mother–child relationship and to the marginal role of the partner, and residential matrifocality, which instead stresses the composition of the household. Clearly enough, the unstable Caribbean union patterns are an important underlying factor of the dynamics of family structure. As a result of the instability of unions and of a high illegitimacy rate, women often rear their children alone, which strengthens the mother–child relationship and is supposed to increase male irresponsibility. These psychological patterns are consistent with the alleged frequency of households in which there is no continuously-present adult male, and which consist of two or three generations on the mother's side. The matrifocal households are thus composed either of a woman and her children (two generations), or also include the grandmother as in the case of an early pregnancy (three generations). All these women have no current partner or, at the most, have visiting partners.

This paper aims at assessing the frequency of residential matrifocality. However, even if the demographer cannot pretend fully to investigate relational matrifocality, some psychological and sociological conclusions can be inferred from quantitative data. For instance, the mother–child relationship is even stronger in the three-generation household, since two single women take care of the children. Conversely, high proportions of male-headed households (and therefore of nuclear households) are indicative of family structures in which the father–husband plays an important role and is by no means marginal.

Unfortunately, even residential matrifocality is sometimes given different meanings. For instance, it is generally believed that the maternal bond is so strong that the maternal role lasts far longer than the childbearing period. As R.T. Smith noted in the three Guyanese villages he studied, the older woman takes such an active part in the rearing of her grandchildren that these are sometimes completely left to the grandmother by their mother, especially if she works (1956: 145; also Clarke 1966: 179–199). This type of family household, also described by Henriques (1953: 110) and usually referred to as the 'grandmother family', is not exactly comparable to the matrifocal household, since the middle generation is missing, but it implies the same nexus of relationships.

More confusingly, some of the major contributors to the study of matrifocality attempted to substantiate their arguments with statistical data, but the typologies they set up, the definitions they adopted or the way they organized their data make it very difficult to assess their contribution.

R.T. Smith argued that households with female heads are predominantly three-generation groups (1956: 105) because he found in his three Guyanese villages more children belonging to three- than to two-generation groups. (See Table IXa, p. 101.) Leaving aside the fact that the distribution of children is not conclusive with regard to the distribution of households, a surprising assertion should be quoted: although Smith stated that 'households with male heads are primarily two-generation groups devoted to the rearing of children. They are also predominantly based upon a conjugal union of some kind' (1956: 103), he also wrote that 'all households irrespective of headship tend to be matrifocal' (ibid: 102). How could male-headed nuclear households[2] be matrifocal? The argument is as follows: 'in each village, there is a larger proportion of persons of this type of household (ie male-headed) who are related to the head's spouse than to the head himself' (ibid: 102). In other words, the criterion of a nuclear household is no longer the fact that the household is male-headed and consists of a stable couple rearing their children, but the line of descent of those persons of kin living in the household.

In *Family and Colour in Jamaica* Henriques set up the following typology: A. christian family, B. faithful concubinage, C. maternal or grandmother family, D. keeper family (1935: 105). In the C type, 'the grandmother or some female relative, perhaps a sister, usurps the function of the father and at times that of the mother. Such a family can originate through the girl becoming pregnant while still living at home. The household may consist of her mother, her mother's sister, and the girl's siblings. The girl may remain at home and look after her child, but in many cases she leaves and the child is brought up by its grandmother ... There are thus two types to be distinguished in category C. One where there is no male head of the family and the grandmother or other female relative fulfils the function of both father and mother; and the other where the grandmother may stand in the place of the mother but a man is nominally the head of the household' (ibid: 110).

Thus although Henriques defined a type B faithful concubinage and a type D keeper family in which the male common-law partner is stable (type B) or likely to leave the household (type D), he introduced a sub-type C which obscures his typology: males can be found in almost all households. In fact he goes on to write that 'there is a tendency for types B, C, and D to coalesce together' (ibid: 109). Furthermore, as noted by several scholars, his attempt to use the Jamaican census of 1943 to quantify the four family types (the 'Christian family' being based on marriage) was unsuccessful, because the census categories 'single' and 'common-law' heads of household overlap with family types B, C and D without any possibility of isolating them (ibid: 112–114). Henriques, on the basis of his observations, nevertheless stated

[2] 'The majority of male household heads in all three villages are married, and even where the head has a common-law wife he is definitely supposed to provide for her and their children, and their relationship cannot be considered as any frivolous arrangement' (ibid: 102).

that 'of all households, 25 per cent would come under the heading of monogamous union (type A), 25 per cent under faithful concubinage, and the remainder divided in an inexact proportion between C and D' (ibid: 111). Lastly, Henriques paid no attention to the possibility that a household could consist of a single woman with her children. As shown by the above quotation it looks as if he had been obsessed by the grandmother role and had substituted her to the mother in his description of female-headed households.

Clarke devoted a chapter of her book *My Mother who Fathered me* to the organization of the households, defining types of residential grouping: A. simple family-type household (eg nuclear family); B. extended family (eg nuclear family extended by the addition of other kin); C. and D. 'denuded family household, containing either a mother or a father living alone with his or her children. These might be either of the simple or extended type' (1966: 117). Section III of the same chapter described the denuded families, which correspond to our two-generation group, if of course the single parent is the mother, as is most generally the case.[3] Clarke found that 15, 30 and 21 per cent of all households were 'denuded' in her three samples (average: 19 per cent, of which 15 per cent were female-headed) and were 'evenly divided between the simple and extended types' (ibid: 127). Lastly, she examined the 'grandmother households', and found that they amounted to 14 per cent of all households.[4] She also considered whether the mother and/or the father of the children lived in the household. Of the 194 grandchildren living with their grandmothers, 78 lived with their mother only, 84 without either parents, 22 with both parents, and 10 with their father only (ibid: 136–137; also table 16). But since we do not know the number of children per household, we cannot assess precisely the frequency of matrifocal households.

In view of the ambiguity and variety of the definitions of residential matrifocality, we shall simply present a typology of households which is sufficiently detailed to assess the frequency of as many types of households as possible. However, we shall comment more upon those who are at the heart of the debate on the Caribbean family patterns, and especially the two- or three-generation female-headed household.

For reasons which are developed when discussing the data from Guadeloupe–Martinique, we shall call 'matrifocal' the three-generation households. Two-generation households headed by a single woman will be referred to as non-matrifocal, non-nuclear households, since such a household can become nuclear if the woman finds a stable partner, or matrifocal if she remains single while her daughter gives birth to a baby without keeping her sexual partner. Needless to say, the frequency of nuclear households, whether simple or extended, will be a no less important indicator, since it has been regarded as the logical alternative to matrifocality.

[3]This was the case in 78 per cent of the households in Sugartown, 81 per cent in Orange Grove and 84 per cent in Moca (ibid: 126).
[4]For the sake of simplicity, we do not give here figures pertaining to the 'greatgrandmother households' (8 out of 96).

3 Statistical Data on Matrifocality

International comparisons of the composition of households, based on the World Fertility Survey, are difficult because of the heterogeneity of WFS data. For instance, for the Dominican Republic and Guyana one must rely on the household surveys to set up a typology, whereas in Jamaica, Guadeloupe and Martinique, the individual questionnaire must be used. In other words, the distribution of the whole population according to the type of household is known in Guyana and the Dominican Republic, whereas the household distribution of women aged 15–49 must be computed for Jamaica, Guadeloupe and Martinique. Furthermore, women aged 15–19 and still attending schools were not interviewed in Jamaica and Guyana. In the following tables, such women have been excluded from the Guadeloupe–Martinique sample, and the Guyanese sample has been confined to households in which at least one woman aged 15–49 and not attending school could be found.[5]

Comparisons between the Jamaican, Guyanese and Guadeloupe–Martinique surveys can be made, but it has been impossible to interpret the Dominican Republic sample to obtain comparability. This last survey is therefore dealt with separately. It seemed useful, however, to compare the Dominican data and the Cuban census data, because of the similarities of the two countries, especially their common colonial past.

A far more important difficulty stems from different coding of the basic data, and because of lack of more detailed information, the resulting heterogeneity in the typologies of households can be only partly reduced. In the case of the Dominican Republic household survey, the following typology is available: no couple households, nuclear households, laterally extended households, vertically extended households, laterally and vertically extended households.

According to the household questionnaire of the Jamaican Fertility Survey, the interviewed woman could be the head of the household, the spouse of the head, the daughter of the head, a tenant or servant, a relative (other than the spouse or the daughter), or a friend. Unfortunately, the union status of the head of household is unknown, except of course when the interviewed woman herself is the head.

In Guyana, the information gathered in the household survey is extremely detailed, but organized in a completely different way. Eight basic types are first defined, and combinations of these types are allowed, amounting to a total of 72 types (see appendix A). It has been necessary to reduce these items to a few, on the basis of fundamental assumptions which are described below.

[5]The figures for Guadeloupe and Martinique are therefore slightly different from those published earlier (Charbit 1980; Charbit and Leridon 1981, in which the two subsamples were also distinguished).

Let us describe, however, the eight basic types:

1. single person household;
2. one complete family, ie father and mother and their children, or man and woman with no children;
3. one incomplete family, ie father or mother with his or her children;
4. children of either spouse;
5. relatives, ie cousins, aunts, grandmother, etc;
6. two or more incomplete families;
7. two or more complete families;
8. persons other than family members but not relatives.

Apart from this, the total number of members of the household is broken down into six major groups by sex and age (age groups: 0–14, 15–49, 50 and over). This information can be computed to set up a precise typology of households very close to that based on the Guadeloupe–Martinique survey, in which the sex and union status of the head of the household and the relationship of the interviewed woman to the head are known, allowing a precise assessment of residential matrifocality as defined above.

To sum up: some figures can be given for the Dominican Republic, using a rather simple typology; some types of households can be isolated in the case of Jamaica; and complete and detailed typologies can be set up for Guyana and Guadeloupe–Martinique. Much comparative analysis is possible, except for the Dominican Republic, since we have no precise information on what is really falling into the categories of the typology.

3.1 THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC AND CUBA

In the Dominican Republic, single-person households amount to 27.7 per cent of the total, nearly 7 out of 10 households are nuclear, and extended households are very marginal. If the data are broken down by type of residence, nuclear households are even more frequent in rural areas, whereas more single-person households can be found in urban areas, because of the drift towards urban centres of young and unmarried adults looking for jobs (and/or because of a younger age structure in the towns) (table 1).

In the Cuban census of 1970, the households are broken down according to the number of families they contain, families and households being defined as usual (table 2). If single-family households are taken as corresponding to nuclear households, it appears that complete families, as in the Dominican Republic, are more frequent in the rural milieu. Households containing two families are however far more frequent than in the Dominican sample. It might also be that nuclear house-

Table 1 Dominican Republic: household structure

Area of residence	Single-person household	Single nuclear household	Extended nuclear households			Total number of households
			Laterally	Vertically	Laterally and vertically	
Urban	31.1	65.9	0.7	2.2	0.2	5 135
Rural	24.6	72.3	0.3	2.5	0.2	5 754
All	27.7	69.3	0.5	2.4	0.2	10 889

Source: Dominican Republic household survey

Table 2 Cuba: distribution of households according to number of families

Area of residence	Number of families				Total number of households
	0	1	2	3 or more	
Urban	10.8	75.3	12.2	1.7	1 241 293
Rural	7.1	79.6	11.9	1.4	666 630
All	9.5	76.8	12.1	1.6	1 967 923

Source: Cuban census of 1970

holds are in fact somewhat extended, and include other persons than the parental couple and their children. 85 per cent of the total non-institutional population are heads of the household, their spouses and children; grandchildren account for 5 per cent of the total; daughters- and sons-in-law for 2.2 per cent; parents and step-parents for 1.6 per cent; other parents and non-parents for 5.6 per cent. When the household is headed by a woman, the proportions of children-in-law and grandchildren are almost exactly the same (2.0 and 4.9 per cent). In other words, the fact that a woman is head of household does not by itself imply a family structure which should be described as matrifocality. In the typology we have set up, such households are called 'quasi-matrifocal': they include a single woman living with her married or common-law daughters and their partners and with their grandchildren. It should however be noted that in the Cuban data, the female head of household is not necessarily a single woman, and we can only assume that the presence of a daughter- or a son-in-law implies that the husband or wife born to the head of household is living with her.

The Dominican Republic and Cuban data show that in these two countries where the plantation economy remains important, but which experienced different political evolutions, nothing suggests a disintegrated family structure characteristic of the plantation economy; far from it: nuclear households are more frequent in the rural milieu. If matrifocality had been generated by slavery it did not survive it, contrary to the thesis of persistence.

3.2 GUADELOUPE AND MARTINIQUE

The Guadeloupe–Martinique sample (N = 2849) being representative of the female population aged 15–49 in 1975,[6] the following households were missed out:

1 those headed by a woman older than 49 and including no woman between 15 and 49 years old. Given this second condition and the young age structure of the population, this bias concerns a small percentage of households. Moreover, a woman over 49 could be a member of a household without being its head;
2 those with only one girl below 15, as in the case of a widowed or divorced father living with his daughter. Since unions before the age of 15 are rather rare, the study of household structures does not suffer a real limitation;
3 those consisting of men only. Here again, in a study of family structure through the distribution of households, this bias is of no real importance.

The probability of a given household being surveyed was proportional to the number of women aged 15–49 living in this household; as a result three-generation matrifocal households, which include at least two women, tend to be overrepresented, whereas nuclear households, which include only one woman, tend to be under-represented.

Households can be divided into five major categories (table 3).

Three-generation matrifocal households

Only 4.3 per cent of all households are matrifocal, if matrifocality is defined by three generations of women and children living together, and the women either having 'visiting' union status or not being currently in a union. Because of the age limits of the sample, the woman interviewed could either be head of household or not. Three sub-categories can thus be distinguished.

1 The woman interviewed is not head of household, but her daughter is; both women are single at the time of survey; the woman interviewed has children.
2 The woman interviewed is head of household. If she is reaching the end of her fecund life, she personifies the first generation, her single daughter the second one. In fact, sub-categories (1) and (2) can be added up (3.5 per cent of the sample).
3 If the head of household is a rather young woman, she could be the middle generation, the first one

[6] The following pages are partly taken from Charbit 1980.

Table 3 Guadeloupe and Martinique: distribution of women by type of household

Type of household	per cent		N	
A Matrifocal households				
(a + b) Single woman, head of household, living with her single daughter(s) and the daughter's children	3.5	4.3	91	112
(c) Single woman, head of household, living with her parent(s) and her children	0.8		21	
B Quasi-matrifocal households				
Single woman, head of household, living with her daughter, herself married or common-law and having children	0.4		10	
C Non-matrifocal, non-nuclear households				
Single woman, head of household				
living alone and childless	2.3	18.1	60	470
living alone and having children	15.8		410	
D Nuclear and polynuclear households				
Married or common-law couple				
childless	4.3	68.4	112	1774
with children	59.0		1530	
with at least one daughter, single and having a child	4.6		119	
with at least one daughter, married or common-law, childless or not	0.5		13	
E Other households	8.8		228	
All women[a]	100.0		2594	

[a]All women are aged 15–49; those aged 15–19 and still attending school are not included.

being her parent(s) who live with her, and the third one being her own children. Only 0.8 per cent of the sample falls in this sub-category. It should moreover be noted that this definition tends to over-estimate matrifocality, since the person(s) of the first generation can be either her mother, her father or both of them. It was, unfortunately, impossible to evaluate the frequency of each case, but the whole sub-category is so reduced in numbers that the bias introduced is negligible. From a functional point of view, this definition also implies an over-estimation of matrifocality. If the woman interviewed is head of household and lodges her parents, it is very unlikely that she is dependent on her family line, as is currently assumed for matrifocal households.

But this is also true of the whole phenomenon of matrifocality. If matrifocality is so marginal in the population, one must conclude either that when a young woman has had a child she has usually settled on her own and left her mother's household, or that birth control is so frequently used that very rarely do young women living with their mothers become pregnant because of occasional sexual relationships. In any case, these young women are much less dependent than is usually assumed.

The low proportion of matrifocal households raises the question of the cultural importance of this family form. If matrifocality is a behaviour specific to social groups different from the bulk of the population, for instance because they belong to the lower strata of society, as was shown by Blake in the case of Jamaica, it can safely be assumed that matrifocality is marginal. If matrifocal households are found in all social groups, its cultural importance is much greater, since a percentage of 4.3 means that in a stationary population the average woman would spend 4.3 per cent of her reproductive life span, ie 1.4 years, in such households. An examination of some of the socio-economic characteristics of the women living in matrifocal households suggests that they usually belong to rather deprived social groups (table 4). They are for instance over-represented among women working in services, as was noted by Cumper in the case of Barbados (1961: 396–397). However they do not constitute a completely distinct social group; we should rather say that the social characteristics of poverty are more frequent among them.

Quasi-matrifocal households

From a functional point of view, it seemed worthwhile investigating if young couples, whether married or common-law, were frequently put up by a single woman head of household. If such a category were frequent, it would then be indicative of the part played by mothers at the beginning of marital life, for instance in helping with children. Here again, this category is very marginal (0.4 per cent), a figure which is striking in contrast with the number of young women (15–24) currently married or common-law: these women constitute 7.0 per cent of the whole sample.

Non-matrifocal, non-nuclear households

18.1 per cent of all women fall into this category; most of them have children (15.8 per cent). Some of these

Table 4 Guadeloupe and Martinique: selected social and economic characteristics of women in matrifocal and non-nuclear, non-matrifocal households

Social and economic characteristics of the woman	Women belonging to		All types of households
	Matrifocal	Non-nuclear, non-matrifocal	
Labourer	5.8	8.7	3.9
Maid, servant	37.1	46.3	24.4
Ownership of the lodging	72.6	54.5	65.7
No electricity in the lodging	50.7	45.5	37.7
No running water in the lodging	47.6	42.4	39.7

NOTE: percentages of total survey sample in each type of household.

children are, in fact, young girls who were interviewed and declared their single mother as head of household. An important question is whether this category reflects the incidence of the instability of unions or not.

First, currently single women are not all representative of unstable Caribbean unions. A woman can be currently single because she is legally married but separated ('de facto') from her husband; she can also be a divorcee or a widow. Only a spinster can be assumed to have been involved in a union specific to the Caribbean (visiting or common-law) (although common-law unions are more and more frequent in Europe).

Secondly, with regard to those young women who had never been in union but who fell into the age limits of the sample and who were interviewed, there is no reason to assume that they will all become pregnant because of occasional sexual relationships: contraception is more and more practised in Guadeloupe and Martinique, as a result of very rapid modernization (Charbit and Leridon 1981). If divorced or widowed women and these young girls are subtracted from the category, only 14 per cent of non-nuclear, non-matrifocal households can be regarded as the product of unstable Caribbean union patterns.

This category evokes one of the stages of the life cycle described by R.T. Smith. At first sight, these households can be regarded as being potentially matrifocal, and they may become matrifocal if a third generation is added, should the daughter of the head of household become pregnant. However, this will not often be the case for a number of demographic reasons. First, when the single woman head of household is interviewed, some of her children could be males, in which case they will probably not stay in the household when grown up. Secondly, in order for the household to become matrifocal her daughter would have to experience the same union patterns, which is far from certain for the reasons quoted above, in which case a third generation will not be added to the household. Thirdly, the woman would have to remain single at the same time her daughter is also single and a mother. The probability that both union histories coincide is indeed limited. Fourthly, the single woman head of the household may later get married or find a stable common-law partner. In view of the large proportion of nuclear households numbered in the sample, such a transformation of the household would seem to be likely.

In favour of matrifocality, however, it may be argued that these single mothers belong to the lower social strata. Furthermore, these women, regardless of their social status, might also be likely to experience a series of unstable partnerships if it is true that a single mother is regarded by the rest of the population as having failed to create a nuclear household which in Guadeloupe–Martinique constitutes a model of reference.

An examination of the socio-economic characteristics of the single women heads of household shows that, as in the case of the women who live in pure matrifocal households, these do not constitute a totally distinct social group (see table 4).

This ambiguous situation might contribute to give to matrifocality some cultural importance: although residential matrifocality is statistically marginal and relational matrifocality is fully experienced in only 14 per cent of all households, the model is probably not felt by the bulk of the population as totally alien to it. In a stationary population, at least some years of the life span would be spent in either of the two types of households, and it should be noted that from the point of view of the socialization of children, these years might be psychologically important in so far as some childhood would be spent in households from which adult males are absent.

Nuclear households

By contrast, nuclear households are by far the most numerous in the population. Here again, sub-categories are worth studying. First of all, one should note that childless couples are rather rare (4.3 per cent), whereas married or common-law couples with children amount to 86.2 per cent of all nuclear households (or 68.4 per cent of the whole sample). Two sub-categories could be indicative of the strength of family networks: that of young single mothers kept by their family, and that of young couples, childless or not, living at the house of the girl's parents, a sub-category which could be defined as polynuclear. Whereas the first sub-category is rather frequent (4.6 per cent) because a noticeable proportion of young girls become pregnant after occasional sexual relationships, the second sub-category is practically negligible (0.5 per cent).

Other households

8.8 per cent of all households cannot be classified in one of the four above categories. They consist of various

Table 5 Jamaica: relationship to head of household and union status of the interviewed woman

Relationship to head of household and union status	per cent	N
I Single woman head of household		
Never in a union	0.6	18
Was married (currently single)	2.2	68
Was in a common-law union (currently single or visiting)	11.4	354
II Head of household with partner, or spouse of head (nuclear household)		
Married	25.8	799
Common-law	22.2	688
III Daughter of head of household		
Married	1.0	31
Common-law	1.1	34
Visiting	8.0	249
Currently single	4.9	152
Never in a union	5.9	169
IV Other relationships to head of household	17.3	534
All women	100.0	3096

Source: Jamaica Fertility Survey

kinds of family relationships: a single woman, childless, and living with her father; two sisters sharing a flat; a maid living with her employers; a young girl living with relatives, such as an aunt; etc.

To sum up, table 3 shows that residential matrifocality is marginal and that nuclear households are by far the most important category, although the instability of unions in the Caribbean society is reflected in a noticeable proportion of single women living with their children.

3.3 JAMAICA

Because of the limitations of the data on Jamaica, only a few types of households can be quantified on the basis of the distribution of the women according to their relationship to the head of household (table 5). When the interviewed woman is the head of the household and is currently single after having been married or involved in a common-law union, the household can be of the matrifocal or quasi-matrifocal or non-matrifocal, non-nuclear type. When the respondent is the head of household or her spouse and is currently married or in a common-law union, the household is nuclear. But the woman interviewed can be the daughter of the head, and in this case we do not know what is the head's union status.[7] These daughters must therefore be distributed between the first two groups of households. Fertility differences by union status and type of residence cannot be ignored. Indeed, the mean number of children born to urban single women heads of households is equal to that of urban married or common-law women (3.3), but in the rural areas, single women have 4.2 children as opposed to 4.9. Furthermore, the 14 Jamaican parishes are purely urban, purely rural or of a mixed nature; therefore for each parish a double weighting must be used to categorize the daughters of heads of household.

Lastly, when the interviewed woman is a servant, a tenant or another parent, we cannot use the same procedure and the woman must be included into a residual category (other types of households). Among the 3096 Jamaican women of child-bearing age in the sample, 64.2 per cent belong to nuclear households, whether legal or not, and 18.5 per cent live in households headed by a single woman. If it is assumed that girls aged 15–19 and still attending school at the time of the survey are more likely to belong to better-off social strata in which marriage is more frequent, this percentage of nuclear households must be regarded as a minimum.

It is not possible to distinguish between pure matrifocal, quasi-matrifocal and non-matrifocal, non-nuclear households, but the union status of daughters of heads of households suggest that young married or common-law couples are, as in Guadeloupe and Martinique, more likely to live in their own household. In the Jamaican sample, only 65 women were both married (or involved in a common-law union) and surveyed as daughters of the head of household, which amounts to 2.1 per cent of the 3096 women. But it should be recalled that the union status of the head of household is unknown. Since some of the latter are married women, not all married daughters live in quasi-matrifocal households; some belong to polynuclear households. Therefore, this percentage of 2.1 is probably too high, and the real proportion of young couples living with a single woman head of household (quasi-matrifocal household) is probably closer to that observed in Guadeloupe–Martinique (0.4 per cent; see table 3).

In her study of three areas of Kingston, Clarke

[7]As stated above, the relationship of the interviewed woman to the head of household and the woman's union status are available, but nothing is known about the head of household himself.

Table 6 Jamaica: distribution of women aged 15 and above according to type of household

Type of household	Sample							
	Sugartown		Orange Grove		Mocca		All	
	N	per cent	N	per cent	N	per cent	N	per cent
Simple nuclear	193	45.5	63	30.7	51	34.9	307	39.6
Extended	77	18.2	70	34.1	44	30.2	191	24.7
Denuded simple	46	10.8	16	7.8	14	9.6	76	9.8
Denuded extended	55	13.0	46	22.5	18	12.3	119	15.3
Single person	44	10.4	–	–	15	10.3	59	7.6
Siblings	9	2.1	10	4.9	4	2.7	23	3.0
All	424	100.0	205	100.0	146	100.0	775	100.0

Source: E. Clarke 1957: 192–194

presented the distribution of the whole population of her three samples (2280 persons) into six types of households. Then each type of household is broken down by head and union status of the head. 'Simple' and 'extended' complete families amount to 63 per cent of the households in Orange Grove, 50 in Sugartown, 52 in Mocca. Again 'denuded' families, whether simple or extended, are rather common in two of the three samples (19 per cent, out of which 15 per cent were female-headed) (Clarke 1966: 206).

More comparable to the Jamaican Fertility Survey data are Clarke's figures pertaining to the 'adult female population', ie above 15 (Clarke 1966: 192–194). As shown in table 6, about 64 per cent of that population lived in simple or extended nuclear households. Daughters of head of household are redistributed among our first two categories, in order to assess the relative frequency of nuclear and denuded families. Since Clarke's samples are urban, half of the daughters are attributed to nuclear families, and the other half to denuded families. It then appears that in the Jamaican Fertility Survey, 77.2 per cent of the women belong to nuclear households as opposed to 22.8 belonging to denuded families. These figures match satisfactorily with Clarke's data, in spite of the different periods of reference (1957 as opposed to 1977) and the fact that the Fertility Survey is confined to the 15–49 age groups, whereas older women are included in Clarke's sample. Clarke's monograph can therefore be regarded as fairly representative of urban Jamaican family patterns.

Lastly, it should be noted that in the 1950s, M.G. Smith studied matrifocality in five small samples. He found 18.7 per cent of matrifocal households in the island of Carriacou (N=42), 8.9 per cent in Latante, a small peasant community (N=9), 8.8 per cent in Greenville, a small village of fishermen (N=10), 7.14 of the rural population (N=72), and 6.6 per cent in Kingston (N=28) (M.G. Smith 1962: 65, 96, 123, 161).

Beyond the differences observed between Clarke's, Smith's and the Jamaican Fertility Survey data, it clearly appears that in none of the samples does matrifocality appear as a common family pattern and certainly not as a pattern shared by the majority of the population.

3.4 GUYANA

Since the pioneering works of R.T. Smith (1956), the Guyanese family has been rather well studied. In the socio-anthropological literature, a fundamental distinction is drawn between the Indian family and that referred to as being of African origin.

One of the most representative examples is M.G. Smith's introduction to the 1966 edition of Clarke's monograph: 'The family life of West Indian "lower class" Negroes ... is highly unstable; marriage rates are low, especially during the earlier phases of adult life, and illegitimacy rates have always been high. Many households contain single individuals, while others with female heads consist of women, their children, and/or their grandchildren ... Excluding legal marriage, mating is brittle, diverse in form and consensual in base among these Creole or Negroid populations. The implications of this mating structure for the composition and stability of familial groups is perhaps most easily appreciated by comparing these Creole patterns with others current among East Indians of comparable socio-economic position in British Guiana and Trinidad' (1966: i). According to him, visiting relationships, one of 'several alternative conjugal patterns' among Creoles are 'either absent or extremely rare' among East Indians. The latter marry early, whereas the 'consensual cohabitation with the same or other partners precedes marriage by several years' in a Creole community (1966: ii, iii).

R.T. Smith emphasizes another feature of the Indian family. The father occupies a central position: his authority is unchallenged, even when it is undermined by the economic contribution of his wife or of his children (1963: 42).

These generalizations over the mating and family patterns of the East-Indian community are based on the works of Jayawardena (1960, 1962) and R.T. Smith and Jayawardena (1959). 3723 persons living in 574 households located in the county of Berbice were surveyed between 1956 and 1958. Data on the classification of domestic groups are of particular interest to us since they describe the distinction between Indians and non-Indians with regard to the consequences of mating

Table 7 Guyana: composition of households which women aged 15–49 belong to, by ethnic origin and sex of head of household

Ethnic origin and sex of head of household	Single person households	Nuclear households		Polynuclear households		Single parent households		Other households	All	
		Simple	Extended	Simple	Extended	Simple	Extended		per cent	N
Indians										
Male	–	66.0	21.8	5.5	3.9	1.3	1.3	0.2	100.0	2221
Female	3.5	6.5	20.2	0.6	5.3	37.5	25.5	0.9	100.0	341
All	0.5	58.1	21.6	4.8	4.1	6.1	4.5	0.3	100.0	2562
Africans										
Male	–	47.8	41.1	1.6	3.4	1.9	4.2	–	100.0	924
Female	2.6	4.9	14.9	0.2	1.7	35.7	39.7	0.3	100.0	572
All	1.1	31.4	31.0	1.1	2.7	14.8	17.8	0.1	100.0	1496
All ethnic origins										
Male	–	60.7	27.7	4.1	3.7	1.5	2.2	0.1	100.0	3534
Female	2.8	6.0	16.7	0.3	3.0	36.7	33.9	0.6	100.0	1082
All[a]	0.7	47.9	25.1	3.2	3.6	9.7	9.6	0.2	100.0	4616

[a]Including all women of other ethnic groups (mixed, European, Chinese) except for 25 women for whom the sex of head of household was not known.
Source: Guyana Fertility Survey

patterns on family structures: 'Whereas East Indian families are nucleated in separate domestic groups, among the Creoles nuclear or elementary families are systematically fragmented and dispersed throughout two or more households as a direct effect of their mating organization; and whereas among East Indians paternity is relatively fixed and constant in its form, content and context, among the Creoles its modes and effectiveness vary as a function of differing conjugal forms and their combination' (M.G. Smith, 1966: iv).

Though a brief summary, this is the dominant socio-anthropological interpretation of family patterns in Guyana. The household survey and the individual questionnaire of the Guyana Fertility Survey allow an in-depth study of the composition of households, on the basis of which a typology of households can be set up. A detailed discussion of the methodological problems raised by the utilization of the data collected by the Guyana Fertility Survey can be found in appendix A.

Simple and extended nuclear households

Table 7 gives the distribution of the women of child-bearing age, broken down by the sex and ethnic origin of the head of household.[8] 47.9 per cent of all women aged 15–49 and not attending school belong to a simple nuclear household. If extended households are taken into account, nearly three out of four women belong to nuclear households. The second most important category is the single-parent family (19.5 per cent), whereas the polynuclear households, which give another hint of the importance of the extended family, are not very frequent (6.8 per cent). Is the fundamental distinction usually drawn between Indian and non-Indian families consistent with the data?

Regardless of the sex of the head of household, all categories of nuclear households (nuclear or polynuclear, whether simple or extended) contain 88.6 per cent of the Indian women and 66.2 per cent of those of African origin. Among the households headed by a man, the figures are quite comparable: 9 out of 10 households are nuclear (though more often extended among the Africans, whereas more often confined to the nuclear couple among the Indians).

In striking contrast, among the households headed by a woman, single-parent households amount to 75.4 per cent among the African subsample and to 63.0 per cent among the Indian one, whereas nuclear households represent 19.8 and 26.7 per cent of the two communities. In other words, there are no distinct models according to ethnicity: the nuclear family is largely dominant in both groups, albeit less frequent but more often extended among women of African descent.

However, the role of the male seems more important in the Indian community: he is the head of household in 86.7 per cent of the 2562 households, as opposed to 61.8 per cent in the 1496 African households (table 8).

[8]In the following pages, data pertaining to the two major ethnic groups (East Indians, persons of African origin) are analysed. However, the overall figures include other ethnic groups ('mixed', 'European').

Table 8 Guyana: distribution of the interviewed women according to their ethnic origin and sex of head of household

Sex of head of household	Ethnic origin of the woman			
	African	Indian	Other	All[a]
Male	61.8	86.7	69.7	76.6
Female	38.2	13.3	30.3	23.4
All	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	1496	2562	558	4616

[a]Including all women of other ethnic groups (mixed, European, Chinese), but for 25 women for whom the sex of head of household was not known.

Matrifocal households

Table 9 shows the distribution of women in the various types of households, broken down by ethnic origin and sex of head of household. 73.8 per cent of all women belong to nuclear households out of which 46.4 are simple, 25.1 extended and 6.8 per cent polynuclear.[9] As in Guadeloupe and Martinique, matrifocal and quasi-matrifocal households are marginal; however, non-matrifocal, non-nuclear households are less frequent (12.6 per cent as opposed to 18.1 per cent; see table 3).

This difference is to be attributed to the family patterns of East-Indian women: only 6.9 as opposed to 21.1 per cent of the African are single women heads of household. The interpretation of table 7 stressed that differences between Africans and Indians were somewhat limited, especially in so far as nuclear households were concerned. Table 9 confirms this judgement: matrifocality, usually regarded as being specific to the Negro community, can also be found in the Indian ethnic group, albeit less frequently.

When the sex of the head of household is taken into consideration, patterns common to both communities appear. Among those headed by a woman, high and comparable proportions of non-matrifocal, non-nuclear households are numbered (51.6 and 55.2 per cent). In simple nuclear households, the head is never a female, which implies that the woman's partner, whether married or common-law, is always recognized as the head in both communities.[10]

Anthropological research on the Indian family

In several papers published in the 1960s, Jayawardena asserted that the extended family was an ideal for the Indians, because it was the dominant model in the

[9]The slight difference in the proportion of nuclear households shown in table 6 (79.7 per cent) is equal to the percentage of quasi-matrifocal households (1.4) which contain a conjugal pair living in the mother's household.

[10]Purely technical reasons explain why 'other households' are much more frequent when the head is a male. Since the common characteristic of matrifocal, quasi-matrifocal and non-matrifocal, non-nuclear households is that the head is a female, the program rejected in the residual category all those women who did not fulfil this condition and several other fairly limiting ones in addition. This did not happen in the case of households headed by men.

Table 9 Guyana: distribution of women by type of household, ethnic origin and sex of head of household

Ethnic origin of the woman and sex of head of household	Type of household							All	
	Matrifocal	Quasi-matrifocal	Non-matrifocal, non-nuclear	Nuclear simple	Nuclear extended	Polynuclear	Other	per cent	N
Indian									
Male	–	–	–	66.0	21.8	9.4	2.8	100.0	2221
Female	2.9	6.5	51.6	–	20.2	5.9	12.9	100.0	341
All	0.4	0.9	6.9	57.2	21.6	8.9	4.1	100.0	2562
African									
Male	–	–	–	47.6	41.0	5.0	6.4	100.0	924
Female	7.2	4.9	55.2	–	14.7	1.9	16.1	100.0	572
All	2.7	1.9	21.1	29.4	31.0	3.8	10.1	100.0	1496
All ethnic origins									
Male	–	–	–	60.6	27.7	7.8	3.9	100.0	3534
Female	5.4	6.0	53.9	–	16.6	3.2	14.9	100.0	1082
All	1.3	1.4	12.6	46.4	25.1	6.8	6.4	100.0	4616

Table 10 Guyana: distribution of women by type of household, ethnic origin and current union status

Ethnic origin and current union status	Type of household							All	
	Matrifocal	Quasi-matrifocal	Non-matrifocal, non-nuclear	Nuclear simple	Nuclear extended	Polynuclear	Other	per cent	N
Indian									
Married	–	–	–	68.1	19.7	10.4	1.8	100.0	1569
Common-law	–	–	–	66.4	16.8	10.1	6.7	100.0	149
Visiting	5.6	–	47.2	5.6	22.2	–	19.4	100.0	36
Currently single	4.1	1.2	42.9	5.9	32.4	2.9	10.6	100.0	170
Never had a union	–	0.9	13.5	47.3	24.5	7.1	6.7	100.0	638
All	0.4	0.3	6.9	57.8	21.6	8.9	4.1	100.0	2562
African									
Married	–	–	–	55.5	31.3	5.1	8.1	100.0	508
Common-law	–	–	–	52.5	33.2	5.9	8.4	100.0	202
Visiting	5.8	0.6	43.9	4.7	30.7	1.9	12.4	100.0	362
Currently single	8.5	–	46.6	2.8	23.3	2.9	15.9	100.0	176
Never had a union	–	–	30.2	24.6	34.3	2.8	8.1	100.0	248
All	2.4	0.1	21.1	31.5	31.0	3.8	10.1	100.0	1496
All Guyana	1.1	0.4	12.6	47.6	25.1	6.8	6.4	100.0	4616

Source: Guyana Fertility Survey

country of origin, but that the process of integration favourized the nuclearization of the family (Jayawardena 1960: 77; 1962: 57; 1968: 439–440; R.T. Smith and Jayawardena 1959: 344).

'In Indian culture the extended family is a more highly valued alternative to the nuclear family. On marriage, a son and his wife are expected to reside in his father's home. This rule is generally followed but the length of residence varies with several factors. Ideally, all or most married sons should live with the father until his death, but this ideal is never attained in plantations in British Guiana where the period of the married son's residence varies from a few months to about five years' (Jayawardena 1962: 57). He also quoted the housing policy of the estate-owners as a factor favourable to nuclearization.

It should be noted that the 'extended family' is defined by Smith and Jayawardena as two nuclear families sharing the same roof, eg a father and mother, their son and daughter-in-law. The dynamics of the family life are carefully described, and especially the conflicts, the consequence of wage-earning on the son's independence, and the progressive separation of household duties, which are at first jointly accomplished by the mother and the daughter-in-law (Jayawardena 1962: 56–58; Smith and Jayawardena 1959: 337–340). The stem family is not, however, looked upon as characteristic of the Indian communities. Consistently with his central thesis of a partial adaptation of Indian migrant communities to the new living conditions imposed by the estates, Jayawardena thus implicitly suggests that the extended nuclear families are characteristic of the Indians, whereas the Guyanese family would rather be simply nuclear.

Our data do not allow a full assessment of this point of view. Indeed, what Jayawardena calls the extended family corresponds to our polynuclear households. However, we know only that in our sample such a household contains two nuclear families, without any information about their bonds of kin. But we may safely assume that the relationship is patrilinear, since the head of household is almost always a man; and when the second nucleus consists of collaterals, the whole household falls in the category of extended nuclear households. As shown by table 9, among households headed by a man, 9.4 per cent of the Indian are polynuclear as opposed to 5.0 per cent for the African. But this result should be controlled by the current union status of the interviewed woman, and analysis should be confined to the married and common-law women to eliminate the possible different instability of union patterns between both communities. Table 10 shows that the difference is of the same magnitude: 10.4 as opposed to 5.1 per cent for currently married women; 10.1 and 5.9 per cent for currently common-law women.

We must therefore conclude that once again the Indian and African communities are not as sharply contrasted as is usually believed, in so far as the polynuclear family ('extended' in Jayawardena's terminology) can also be found among Africans.

While 13.3 per cent of the Indian women are heads of households, this is true of 38.2 per cent of the African women. Although our data lack some statistical detail, it can be shown that there are too many factors at work here to allow the traditional conclusion about the dominance of males in Indian subcultures.

The traditional view can be illustrated by the following quotation from Smith and Jayawardena: 'The head of the Indian household is normally a male and although there are a number of female household heads in each of the three samples the majority of them are women who have been left as widows or whose husbands have separated from them. It is not only that Indians attach great importance to male dominance, but the head of [a Muslim or a Hindu] household has certain representative functions which cannot easily be carried out by a woman ...' (1959: 337). There is much more in the same vein.

We cannot pretend to assess statistically the second part of the argument, because what is at stake is distribution of power and roles of authority, which are of a qualitative nature. But we can bring quantitative evidence for or against the first argument: is it true that the woman usually becomes head of household when her husband dies or when divorce occurs? A cross-tabulation of the relationship to head of household by the current union status of the interviewed woman would easily provide the answer: if the assertion is true, a significant difference between Indian and African women should be observed, Indian women heads of household being more frequently widowed, divorced or separated than African women. Unfortunately, and unlike in the Jamaican and Guadeloupe–Martinique surveys, the relationship to head of household has not been coded for Guyana, nor is the legal union status of the interviewed woman known. We must therefore rely on an approximation, the ratio of the 'stock' of these to the number of female heads of household. This ratio should be confined to women aged 35 and above.[11]

Table 11 shows that among the Indian women heads of household, 27.6 per cent are currently single women as opposed to 14.9 per cent of the African. Thus, one of the characteristics of the Indian subculture might be the conditions of access to a dominant role in the household. However, this might be partly due to a pure demographic factor, ie the sex differences in life expectancy,[12] which would affect the Indian as well as the African group. As a matter of fact, R.T. Smith, in his analysis of the household composition of the three Negro villages of Better Hope, Perseverance and August Town, remarked that almost all female heads of household were women who had reached their menopause and that most of them were widowed, had lost their common-law partner or were separated from their husband. And in Perseverance, where the people were younger, comparatively more males were heads of households (R.T. Smith 1956: 65, 119).

[11]This condition of age is aimed at excluding from the computation young women ever-in-union but currently single, in order to deal only with women likely to become heads of households because of the death of their partner. The choice of an age limit seems more appropriate than a condition related to the number of children born to the woman, since Smith and Jayawardena's argument implicity refers to an advanced stage of the life cycle of the woman.

[12]On mortality differences between Africans and Indians during the period 1911–1960, and on the improvement of health conditions on the plantations from the 1930s, see Mandle 1970: 310–312.

Table 11 Guyana: distribution of female heads of households by ethnic origin and current union status (women aged 35 and above)

Number of women heads of household	Ethnic origin	
	African	Indian
Currently single (1)	85	94
All statuses (2)	572	341
Ratio (1)/(2)	14.9	27.6

Source: Guyana Fertility Survey

Jayawardena's data were collected in two plantations of the County of Berbice, from September 1956 to October 1957 (Blairmont), and from February to July 1958 (Port Mourant). The sample of the Guyana Fertility Survey happens to be representative of East Berbice (where Port Mourant is located) and of West Berbice (which includes the Corentyne River District, where Blairmont is located).

It is tempting therefore to try to assess the degree to which Jayawardena's monograph is representative. Moreover, some of his tables give a typology of 'domestic groups' broken down by sex of head of household (1962). One must however be cautious: first, Jayawardena's distribution pertains to 584 households containing 3895 adults of both sexes,[13] not to a sample of women of childbearing age. Fortunately, since the age and sex distribution is fairly regular, biases are limited. Secondly, Jayawardena surveyed the population living on two plantation estates. His sample is heavily determined by its economic activity, whereas the Guyana Fertility Survey is representative of the whole population, regardless of its employment. Lastly, the Guyana Fertility Survey took place twenty years after Jayawardena's research, although this obstacle is less serious than it would seem: even if we cannot assess how representative these data are, they can be useful in testing Jayawardena's central thesis, namely the progressive integration of the Indians into Guyanese society and their assimilation of its norms. In other words, we have at hand two measures of this integration, the second one being taken two decades later.

We have already seen that the allegedly striking contrast between Indian and African families is not confirmed on an examination of available data. Some patterns can be found in both communities, which strengthens Jayawardena's central thesis of the adoption of the dominant norms. From this point of view, the comparison between the survey data and the distribution of family forms on the plantation estates is of great interest.

As shown by table 12, for both sexes and for males only, Jayawardena's main conclusions are confirmed, especially with regard to the proportion of simple nuclear households. Moreover, data concerning all rural Indians confirm those for the region of Berbice. The proportion of polynuclear households seems to have decreased, as Jayawardena would have forecast. However, table 12 shows an increase in the proportion of extended nuclear households (11.5 per cent in Blairmont and Port Mourant, 20.9 per cent in Berbice). It could be argued that this might be due to differences between both populations: on the plantations, the housing policy tended to favour the nuclear family, whereas the fertility survey sample is representative of the population living in the whole county of Berbice, where the housing constraint is not typically present. But since extended nuclear households are more frequent in the African subsample (see table 9), it could also be argued that regardless of the housing constraint, higher proportions of such households could indicate the adoption of the African pattern.

Finally Jayawardena's contribution, although very important, suffers from a lack of points of comparison. He studied the East Indian community in Guyana without fully recognizing the implications of his own thesis of adaptation: he stressed the living conditions of the sugar plantation estates, but overlooked the consequences of the coexistence of the two communities. By providing comparable data on both ethnic groups, the Guyana Fertility Survey reveals that East Indian and African family structures are altogether not as dissimilar as is usually believed.

[13]The sex distribution is given in Smith and Jayawardena 1959.

Table 12 Guyana: typology of households on two estates (1957–1958) and in the region of Berbice (1975)

Sex of head of household and area of residence	Type of households							All	
	Matrifocal	Quasi-matrifocal	Non-matrifocal, non-nuclear	Nuclear simple	Nuclear extended	Polynuclear	Other	per cent	No. of households or no. of women
Male									
Blairmont and Port Mourant	–	–	–	65.9	12.9	12.5	8.7	100.0	519
Berbice	–	–	–	69.7	20.1	7.8	2.4	100.0	719
All rural Indian males	–	–	–	66.6	21.3	9.9	2.2	100.0	1890
Female									
Blairmont and Port Mourant	–	30.8	38.5	–	–	–	30.7	100.0	65
Berbice	2.0	4.0	48.0	–	26.0	7.0	13.0	100.0	100
All rural Indian females	2.8	4.9	53.4	–	21.5	7.3	10.1	100.0	247
Both sexes									
Blairmont and Port Mourant	–	3.4	4.3	58.5	11.5	11.1	11.2	100.0	584
Berbice	0.2	0.5	5.8	61.2	20.9	7.7	3.7	100.0	819
All Indians	0.3	0.6	6.2	58.9	21.3	9.6	3.1	100.0	2137

Source: Blairmont and Port Mourant: our elaboration on Jayawardena's data, 1962: tables I to IV
Rural areas: Guyana Fertility Survey

4 Family Patterns during Slavery

4.1 SOME METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

Even if matrifocality is marginal nowadays, it may have been important in the period of slavery; but if it has become much less frequent since then, this contradicts the theory of persistence. The idea that matrifocality was a necessary result of slavery was clearly and forcefully expressed in the 1950s. The main arguments have been reviewed above, but it is worth recalling that some specialists go as far as saying that 'the nuclear family could hardly have existed in the context of slavery' (Patterson 1967: 167; Clarke 1966: 19; Greenfield 1966: 45). The demographic issue raised looks simple: is it true that families in slavery almost never contained a father?

From the 1970s, and thanks to the works of Higman (1973, 1975, 1976) and Craton (1978, 1979), a source unexploited until then casts new light on the question. In conformity with legal requirements, statistics were produced every three years to assess the 'additions and deductions to the stock of slaves'. For each slave the name, age, sex, colour, country of birth, type of activity and the name of his or her mother when she lived on the estate were recorded. But as ages were uncertain, and since the name of the master was often given to his slaves, the inventories, quite sensibly, were established on the basis of the population of each dwelling rather than by age or alphabetical order. And because of their purpose, these statistics are neutral as far as family patterns are concerned. Even in the hottest days of the controversy over slavery, abolitionists and anti-abolitionists were more concerned with the living conditions of the slaves (and especially their health and mortality) than with their family patterns.

However, this unique source raises serious methodological problems related to uncertainty about the exact relationships between the members of the dwellings: were the men living in the household the partners of the women? Were they the fathers of the children? This problem is discussed in Higman (1975). When the slave rolls explicitly state that the couple is married and that the man is the father of the children, there is no ambiguity, and it may safely be assumed that the family is nuclear; when some of the children were born from previous unions, the nuclear family can be described as enlarged by de facto adoptions. This is the case for the data from Martinique used by Debien (1960) and for some of those from Jamaica and Barbados (Higman 1975). A study on Puerto Rico also suggests that marriages were fairly common among the slaves (Wessman 1980: 283).

This information is available only rarely, and a true family reconstruction is not possible. Even if the couples are known to be married or involved in a stable common-law relationship, methods of historical demography can hardly be used. Not only were parish registers incomplete with regard to the slave population or totally missing, but also the demographic consequences of the plantation economy seriously hinders the method, because of the high mortality, the unstable mating and the constant back-and-forth migrations of the slaves.

In short, the historian using the slave rolls has a hint at the family structures, but does not know with certainty if he is dealing with true families, except when a legal marriage has been concluded. Moreover, numbering nuclear households may give a false impression of stability if men in fact often moved from one household to the other, so that the functioning of families was closer to the matrifocal model than the figures would suggest. This methodological shortcoming can be overcome when studying current family structures by controlling the number of partners a woman had in her life. This is not possible for the case under consideration. However the limitations of such cross-sectional data are not a problem if the basic issue is simply to decide whether nuclear couples or families could be found on the estates. If there are many such households, it can safely be assumed that at least some of them were true families, this being proved if a legal marriage is mentioned in the historical source. When the union status is unknown, data on ages can provide a hint. If both adults of the household are between 20 and 40, and if the age difference between them does not exceed 10 years, they are likely to constitute a couple. Another way of identifying the man living in the household as a husband or a common-law partner is the place of his name in the list of the members of the household: if the man, the woman and the children are listed in this order, they probably constitute a family. Unfortunately, slave lists are usually broken down by sex, making them less useful in this respect. On the basis of both checks, Higman concluded that 75 to 90 per cent of the households of his three Jamaican estates were actual families.

Finally, slave rolls can be used to estimate the distribution of the various family forms, keeping in mind two limitations: the co-residence of a man and a woman does not necessarily mean that they constituted a couple; it is almost impossible to know if children were fathered by the current partner. Therefore, the consequences of the instability of mating patterns on family structures cannot be assessed. And even if a marriage took place, it may have legitimized a common-law union, children being born to the woman but not necessarily to the couple.

4.2 THE BRITISH CARIBBEAN

Table 13 gives the distribution of households by type of family forms for 25 673 Trinidadian slaves in 1813, 814

Table 13 Distribution of the slaves by type of household in selected samples

Type of household	Trinidad (1813)		Jamaica Montpellier (1825)		Bahamas 26 holdings (1822)		Barbuda (1851)	
	N	per cent	N	per cent	N	per cent	N	per cent
Man, woman, children	4 675	18.2	204	25.1	1629	54.1	425	67.6
Man, woman	1 036	4.0	76	9.3	178	5.9	28	4.5
Woman, children	5 690	22.2	328	40.3	377	12.5	50	8.0
Man, children	357	1.4	–	–	16	0.5	6	0.9
Three-generation group	445	1.7	24	2.9	358	11.9	90	14.3
Men alone, or together	12 892	50.2	182	22.4	264	8.8	7	1.1
Women alone, or together					173	5.8	10	1.6
Children separately					16	0.5	13	2.0
Others	578	2.3			–	–	–	–
All slaves	25 673	100.0	814	100.0	3011	100.0	629	100.0
Nuclear families (1+2+5)	6 156	24.0	304	37.3	2165	71.9	543	86.4
Denuded families (3+4)	6 047	23.5	328	40.3	393	13.0	56	8.9
No family (6+7+8+9)	13 470	52.5	182	22.4	453	15.1	30	4.7
All households	25 673	100.0	814	100.0	3011	100.0	629	100.0

NOTE: percentages refer to the distribution of households.
Source: Craton 1979: 28–29, with slight modifications

slaves living on three Jamaican estates in 1825, 3011 slaves belonging to twenty-six Bahamas holdings in 1822, and 629 slaves living in Barbuda in 1852. As is shown, dwellings containing single women with children, ie our non-matrifocal, non-nuclear households, amount from 8 to 40 per cent of all households, whereas two- or three-generation nuclear households are either dominant (Bahamas, Barbuda), or constitute an important minority, a result in complete contradiction with the assertion that families could not exist within the context of slavery. As for matrifocality itself, it is surprisingly rare. In Jamaica for instance, Higman found that only 1.6 per cent of the households consisted of a woman, her children and grandchildren, and even so, the content of the middle generation is unclear (Higman 1973: 535). In Barbuda, 'three-generation groups' (defined as 'two women and children') amounted to 12.6 per cent of the total (Craton 1979: 26). Households including a woman with her children represented 40.3 per cent of all types in Jamaica, 22.2 per cent in Trinidad, and much less in the Bahamas and in Barbuda: admittedly, the low percentage of three-generation matrifocal households can be due to the mortality conditions which prevailed during slavery. But the view that the dominant model of slave families was the single mother with children is certainly exaggerated.

Differences between the islands are to be attributed to the degree of development of the plantation system. Trinidad in 1813 was an area of rapid expansion and under direct supervision (Craton 1979: 27). As in Saint Vincent and Guyana, and unlike the Bahamas, exploitation of slaves was merciless, most males and females being single. Such a context of intensive exploitation of the labour force hindered the making of stable family patterns, hence high proportions of single women with children and more generally of incomplete families.

Demographic factors should also be taken into account, and notably the ethnic composition of the slave population. For instance, about 1817, 7 per cent of the Barbadian slaves were African-born as opposed to 37 per cent in Jamaica and in Trinidad. This was perhaps due to the fact that it was easier to forcibly carry the isolated African-born slaves to this expanding colony. The deportations of Bahamian slaves to Trinidad between 1821 and 1828 often sparked off rebellions, which can be interpreted as a form of resistance from organized slave communities to arbitrary decisions of masters (Craton 1979: 17–23). Last, the sex ratio was of course far more unbalanced in Trinidad (1250 men for 1000 women) than in Barbados (860) or Jamaica (1000) (Higman 1975: 263–264).

Historical research also casts light on another important area, the amount of difference in the family patterns of African-born and Creole slaves. If Herskovits' thesis is true, nuclear families should be less frequent among the African slaves, because of stronger bonds with the African heritage and especially polygamy. As shown in table 14, the percentage of nuclear households is higher among the African slaves belonging to 26 estates in the Bahamas, whereas extended families are more frequent among the Creoles (Craton 1979: 18). It can of course be argued that this result could be explained by the specificity of the Bahamas Islands, which are not representative of the plantation economy. In a more relevant context, the 'disorganization' of African slaves could be more important. But the argument is not convincing. Higman's data for Jamaica, although less clearly displayed than Craton's, fully confirm this conclusion (Higman 1973: 536).

Contrary to Herskovits' anthropological argument, African polygamy cannot be found among the social

Table 14 Comparison between African-headed and Creole families (Bahamas, 26 slave holdings, 1822)

Family type	African-headed families[a]		Creole families	
	Total slaves	per cent	Total slaves	per cent
1. Man, woman, children	830	61.0	799	48.4
2. Man, woman	138	10.2	40	2.4
3. Woman, children	91	6.7	278	16.8
4. Man, children	11	0.9	5	0.3
5. Three-generation groups	128	9.4	238	14.4
6. Men alone, or together	114	8.4	150	9.1
7. Women alone, or together	48	3.5	125	7.6
8. Children separately	–	—	16	1.0
Totals	1360	100.0	1651	100.0
Nuclear family (1, 2, 5)	1096	80.6	1077	65.2
Denuded family (3, 4)	102	7.5	283	17.1
No family (6, 7, 8)	162	11.9	291	17.7

[a]African-headed families were taken to be those in which both parents, either parent, or the single parent were of African birth. Thus in categories 1, 2 and 5 mixed couples were included.
Source: Craton 1979: 18

group in which it was predicted to be the rule. This result is only apparently paradoxical. To maintain polygamous mating patterns implies several socio-demographic conditions which were not fulfilled on the estates. First, women were few, but even if the sex ratios had been balanced, polygamy would probably not have been practised, because its social functions had been destroyed by slavery. Polygamy is one of the means used in African societies to organize and reinforce social structures; it requires an extended social network and real temporal and spatial stability, which were precisely missing on the estates. In the context of slavery, the most logical mating for isolated individuals was the constitution of couples, and in any case of households composed of a small number of persons. As time passed, kinship could become more diversified. Family structures of the Creoles were thus more complex.

A last point to clarify is whether the evolution of family patterns led to matrifocality. On the one hand, 'demoralization' of slaves was probably much deeper among the Creoles, who had to face the sexual exploitation of women by the Whites. Several contemporaries observed that Creole women were better appreciated as sexual partners than the newly enslaved African women. On the other hand, the tendency towards matrifocality should not be exaggerated. First, figures suggest that nuclear families remained a dominant model. Secondly, both Higman and Craton note that when a birth occurred, the young mother usually left her mother's dwelling and either settled alone or in a hut close to her partner's mother (1973: 543; 1979: 13). This cultural trait, which neither Higman nor Craton explain, certainly did not encourage three-generational matrifocality. Finally, the role of male partners in the building of the family has probably been more important than we have thought.

4.3 MARTINIQUE

In the case of Martinique, the only available evidence is twenty lists of slaves belonging to a sugar mill of the Parish of Trois Ilets, covering the years 1746–1778. They must be cautiously used because Debien is not precise about his methodology. For instance it is not clear how Debien takes into account changes in families occurring during this long period, cross-sectional and longitudinal measurements being mixed up: he asserts that 'several lists gather [these names of slaves] by family' (1960: 45), but he also observes that 'one reads that several of these households have children but it is not said whether they are legitimate or not, then these households are described as having legitimate children, after the occurrence of marriage which apparently modelled the family on that of the master' (1960: 48).

Despite these methodological shortcomings, some patterns emerge from Debien's data. African slaves, who were few, were almost never married. There were three categories of Creoles. First, when only the mother's name is known, no reference whatsoever being made to the father of the children, the planters talked about 'concubinage', a family form quite frequent in St Domingue according to Debien, and characterized by casual or short-term relationships, especially if children were of different colour groups. But if births followed each other quite closely, Debien believes the household to be in fact fairly stable, the partner being absent because of polygynous behaviour.

Then Debien identifies 'maternal households', in which both names of parents are given, the mother's being listed first. It is these households that Debien believes were legitimized by marriage as time passed.

Lastly, in 'conjugal families' the couples were legally married, mostly with other slaves belonging to the estate.

The distribution between the three types of households leaves no ambiguity as to the dominant pattern: out of 75 'families and households', 52 were 'conjugal families' (1960: 48). Debien attributes this result to the influence of the Catholic Church in Martinique, giving as evidence the fact that children were usually baptised soon after birth (1960: 61), but also to 'more advanced racial mixture', which encouraged the adoption of the Whites' mating and family patterns (1960: 51).

If the main results confirm those found in the English-speaking West Indies, one difference should be noted. Whereas Higman believes that the families of Creoles were larger than those of African-born slaves, Debien asserts that it was strictly nuclear. It can be argued that the proportion of African-born slaves was small in Martinique, making their integration easier in extended families.[14] Also, since ethnic origins are not known in Higman's sample, a true comparison with Debien's data is not possible; a lesser disorganization among the white community in Martinique can also be quoted. Lastly, Debien's sample is indeed smaller than Higman's and his methodology is doubtful.

In any case, the standard sociological point of view requires serious rethinking if the historical evidence presented here is reliable. Research on the slave family in the southern states of the United States, it should be noted, also questions the idea that the family was completely disorganized during slavery.

[14]But this argument runs counter to Debien's view on the polygynist origins of the so-called 'concubinage'.

5 The Sex Ratio Argument

5.1 THE PROBLEM

We have shown that matrifocality was certainly not the only family form compatible with slavery; nor was it the most frequent one in some islands. Kunstadter goes so far as to say that the historical explanation is not satisfactory, since matrifocality can be found in societies which do not rely on slavery, such as the Nayar in India or the Mescaleros Apaches (1965: 58, 61). In a less controversial manner, it can be argued that the historical explanation is questionable since it focuses on a single period of the history of the Caribbean populations and ignores the others. The same fairly large proportions of female-headed households could be explained by specific socio-economic conditions totally independent of slavery, which could have generated non-nuclear households resembling the family patterns of slavery, but not inherited from it.[15]

Such is the meaning of the so-called sex ratio argument. It was systematically developed by Marino in 1970, but it had been sketched by Roberts (1955) in a paper on Barbados which did not attract attention, by M.G. Smith (1961) about Cariacou, and by Otterbein (1965). Basically, the argument is that high proportions of female heads of household are explained by a deficit of males in the population. In Barbados for instance, the emigration of men induced a higher participation of women in the labour force. Between 1851 and 1921, the sex ratio in the labour force dropped from 828 to 629 men for 1000 women. According to Roberts, women found themselves at the head of domestic units so that they were compelled to look for jobs in order to meet their own needs and their children's (Roberts 1955: 278–279). In an ironic 'Reply to Otterbein', Goode pointed to his 'great insight that if the men are not there, more households will be headed by women' (Goode 1967: 226). It is not necessary to recall here the argument,[16] but it may be said that Goode did not do justice to it. M.G. Smith, in his treatment of Cariacou, was more subtle: given the heavy shortage of men (649 per 1000 women), women had to choose between emigration, 'lifelong chastity' or single motherhood. According to Smith, women adapted themselves to a demographic constraint which became institutionalized with time (M.G. Smith 1961: 466–467). Finally, the argument is that migrations explain the mating system: the system functions only if men have extra conjugal relationships. Marino goes further, stating that fairly high fertility levels can be achieved in the Commonwealth Caribbean thanks only to this de facto polygamy (Marino, 1970: 167).[17]

To assess the validity of the sex ratio argument, it should first be shown that the deficit of males was high enough and endured long enough to shape mating patterns. Large emigrations could indeed lead to such shortages. We shall therefore recall the history of migration flows in the region, and produce series of sex ratios for the post-slavery period. Secondly, even if the sex ratio reflects the economic context, can it be regarded as a good index? If positive correlations can be found between the sex ratios and family structures, it can at least be presumed that one of the mechanisms of family constitution was subsequent to slavery. But if correlations are not significant, it must be concluded that demographic factors alone cannot explain such original mating patterns.

5.2 MIGRATION FLOWS AND SEX RATIOS FROM THE 19th CENTURY

The influence of migration movements on the sex ratios is particularly clear in Barbados, Grenada and Jamaica.

In Barbados in 1861, before emigration began, there were 864 men for 1000 women. In 1921, the ratio had dropped to 679 per thousand, but it slowly recovered in the following decades (table 15). Whereas 152 777 inhabitants were numbered in 1861, during the following thirty years 30 000 left the island, mainly for Trinidad and the Dutch and British Guyanas. This first flow is generally attributed to the overcrowding of the island, which a traveller described in 1889 as being 'as thickly populated as an anthill' (quoted by Lowenthal 1957: 455). Emigration was then boosted from 1904 by labour recruitment for the digging of the Panama canal: in ten years, 20 000 Barbadians had signed contracts and thousands more migrated spontaneously. After the end of the canal works, Barbadians mostly migrated to the USA. Between 1904 and 1921, at least 70 000 people left the island, at a rate of 2.3 per cent of the total population per annum, two-thirds of the migrants being young men (Lowenthal 1957: 455).

The slow recovery of the sex ratio is due to changes in the nature and direction of the migratory flow. From

[15] Alternatively, it may be argued that the fact that single-female-headed households amounted to 20 to 40 per cent at the time of slavery and that comparable proportions of such households can be found nowadays does not confirm the theory of persistence. It may well be that these households became less frequent when the social structure of slavery progressively faded away, but that other factors strongly reinforced the old pattern of family types inherited from slavery.

[16] See Otterbein 1965, 1966; Goode 1966, 1967; Vicary 1967; Fischer and Derbes 1966; M.G. Smith 1966; Marino 1970.

[17] Indeed, Roberts had shown that gross reproduction rates for men were much higher than for women. The countries under consideration were Jamaica, Barbados, British Guyana, Trinidad; the censuses used were those of 1891, 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931, 1946.

Table 15 Barbados: total population and sex ratios for census years (number of males per 1000 females)

Census year	Total population	Sex ratio (males 15–49 per 1000 females 15–49)
1844	122 198	846
1851	135 939	845
1861	152 727	864
1871	162 042	829
1881	171 860	817
1891	182 867	807
1911	172 337	694
1921	156 774	679
1946	192 800	801
1960	232 327	832
1970	238 386	895

NOTE: Some of these figures are different from those quoted by Roberts (1955: 278) and Lowenthal (1957: 466).
Source: Byrne 1971: 436

1946, the main country of arrival was the United Kingdom, where migrants were above all women employed in services: in 1955 and 1956, for instance, 2818 women left Barbados, amounting to 40 per cent of the total flow (Lowenthal 1957: 487–488). In the 1960s family reunions also contributed to a more balanced sex ratio (Byrne 1971: 437).

Harewood estimated the proportion of the natural growth of Grenada which was lost through emigration: 18 per cent between 1891 and 1901; then 73 per cent between 1901 and 1911 when massive migrations to Brazil and Panama took place; and between 1911 and 1921 the natural increase was more than compensated by emigration. The flow reversed later, due to the immigration policy enforced by the United States from 1924 and to the economic crisis of the 1930s. The outflow resumed during the Second World War, when North American military bases were created in Trinidad. Between 1946 and 1960, migration absorbed 45 per cent of the natural increase. The sex ratio of the population aged 15–44 was 817 in 1901, 703 (1911), 589 (1921), 685 (1946) and 783 (1960) (Harewood 1966: 63–67; 80–81).

In Jamaica as in Barbados and Grenada, large scale migration began towards the end of the 19th century, when the French undertook the digging of the Panama Canal, and was boosted by the construction of the railroads in Costa Rica. Then the North Americans taking over the canal works stimulated migration again. After the end of the works, in 1914, the growth of the export of bananas to the USA, either directly or via Cuba and Haiti, created new migratory streams. A second factor was the series of hurricanes which devastated the banana plantations, reducing to distress and misery the parishes devoted to this monoculture (Saint Ann, Trelawny). Finally, Roberts estimates that net emigration amounted to 146 000 for the period 1881–1921 (out of which went 46 000 to the USA, 45 000 to Panama, 22 000 to Cuba, and 33 000 to other countries, mainly Costa Rica) out of a total population of 580 804 according to the 1881 census (Roberts 1957: 133–141). Then the legal restrictions enforced by the USA bore the same consequences as in Grenada: returns outnumbered departures between 1921 and 1943: + 25 800 as opposed to − 77 100 for the preceding period (1911–1921). Lastly, migration to the United Kingdom with net negative balances of − 195 000 (1943–1960) and − 296 500 (1960–1970) amounted to one-third and then one-half of the natural increase (Roberts 1974: 6–9).

The sex ratios clearly reflect changes in the migratory movements. Mainly males migrated until 1943, but subsequently the sex distribution was more balanced because of family reunification in the United Kingdom and the demand for female labour. The overall sex ratio declined steadily from 1881 to 1943, then increased up to 1970, with a less pronounced temporary decrease between 1943 and 1960 (table 16). However, high birth rates and sex differences in mortality interplay with migrations. Although the age groups are not the same in Robert's (1881–1943) and Sinclair and Boland's series (1943–1970), the sex ratio is far less balanced in the age groups mainly contributing to the labour force (15–29, and 30–54 or 30–44 according to the series under consideration). Roberts also gives ethnic sex ratios for the years 1844, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891, 1911, 1921 and 1943. These ranged below 1000 only for the 'Negroes' and the 'mixed'. They rated higher than 1100 for the Whites all through the period 1844–1921. For the Indians, they dropped from 1703 to 1214 (1891–1921). They remained higher than 3200 for the Chinese between 1891 and 1921 (Roberts 1957: 73). If the sex ratios influenced family structures, this would therefore have been true only for the Negroes and the mixed groups.

The picture is completely different for Cuba, but it nevertheless confirms the consequences of migrations on sex ratios. During the first three decades of the 20th century migrants mainly came from Spain, Jamaica, Haiti and Puerto Rico. But whereas the former mainly settled in the towns, the Caribbean migrants contributed to the labour force on the sugar-cane plantations. Migrants were mostly males: 81 per cent between 1904 and 1928, 77.3 per cent between 1929 and 1934. And since the flow was massive (1 293 058 migrants during the three decades 1904–1934), the sex ratio of the quite large Cuban total population rose from 1076 to 1131, and was much higher for the working age groups. After 1930 the crisis resulted in a halting of the flow and later the Castro revolution induced some emigration. Finally, the Cuban census of 1970 revealed a fairly balanced sex ratio of 1052 (Farnos Morejon and Catasus Cervera 1976: 73–81).

In Guadeloupe and Martinique, the emigration which began in the 1950s did not upset the sex distribution of the remaining population. For the age groups 15–49, it fluctuates around 940, except in 1961 where it is below 920 (table 17).

5.3 SEX RATIOS AND FAMILY STRUCTURES: NATIONAL DATA

Marino produced the sex ratios for twelve islands of the English-speaking Caribbean and for Belize, for the years 1881, 1891, 1911, 1921, 1946 and 1960. His sex ratios

Table 16 Jamaica: sex ratios at census years (number of males per 1000 females)

Age group	Census year				Age group	Census year		
	1881	1891	1911	1921		1943	1960	1970
0–4	991	998	994	1003	0–4	1003	1015	1017
5–14	994	1016	1011	999	5–14	1008	1004	1009
15–29	929	849	851	791	15–29	878	850	915
30–54	950	901	890	846	30–44	973	873	891
55 and more	848	787	811	781	45–64	898	967	939
					65 and more	717	694	791
All	950	917	916	881	All	937	925	951

Source: Roberts 1957: 72 (1881–1921). Sinclair and Boland 1974: 15 (1943–1970)

Table 17 Guadeloupe and Martinique: sex ratios for census years

Year	Sex ratios (males 15–49 per 1000 females 15–49)
1954	937
1961	918
1967	940
1974	940

Source: INSEE

related to the age group 20–49 (males) and 15–44 (females) to take into account differences in ages at entry into union (Marino 1970: 163). To test the influence of sex ratios on family structures, we have calculated the sex ratios at the Census of 1970 for the fifteen units which constitute the Commonwealth Caribbean, keeping the same age groups as Marino.

Column 1 of table 18 shows the proportion of female-headed households (in percentage of all households). Column 2 gives the proportion of common-law women heading a household (in percentage of all common-law women). The correlation coefficient between the sex ratio and the proportion of female heads of households is −0.796. The correlation between the sex ratio and the proportion of common-law women heads of households is −0.506. The first coefficient is significant at 1 per cent, the second at 5 per cent. The first result confirms Otterbein's findings (1965: 72). Figure 1 shows that the major exceptions are Guyana and Trinidad: in spite of sex ratios comparable to those found in Jamaica and Montserrat, the percentages of women heads of households are about one-third smaller. This may well be due to the large Indian communities of Guyana and Trinidad, where men are typically heads of households; for instance even when a woman is widowed, her son may become the head of the household, rather than she herself.

The second result is more surprising: in view of the

Table 18 Commonwealth Caribbean: proportions of female- and common-law women-headed households. Sex ratios in 1970

Country	Percentages of households headed by		Sex ratio (males 20–49 per 1000 females 15–44)
	A woman[a]	A common-law wife[b]	
Barbados	42.9	31.1	720
Belize	24.8	12.6	986
Bermuda	23.3	22.4	1022
Dominica	42.4	24.9	663
Grenada	45.3	36.0	649
Guyana	22.5	13.5	769
British Virgin Islands	24.4	18.9	1130
Cayman Islands	35.5	46.1	735
Turks and Caicos Islands	40.3	32.3	602
Jamaica	33.8	15.4	767
Montserrat	43.7	30.8	787
St Kitts–Nevis–Anguilla	46.6	33.7	613
St Lucia	40.9	24.9	643
St Vincent	45.4	28.7	608
Trinidad and Tobago	26.9	14.5	782

[a]Per 100 heads of households.
[b]Per 100 common-law women.
Source: Commonwealth census, vol 3, table 1; vol 8, table 9; vol 9, table 12

Table 19 Jamaica: sex ratios of internal migrants in each parish (1911–1970) (male migrants per 1000 females)

Parish	Intercensal period			
	1911–1921	1921–1943	1943–1960	1960–1970
Kingston	+586	+386	−3300	−1235
St Andrew	+551	+708	+734	+699
St Thomas	+129 333	+2562	+2640	−464
Portland	+2 314	−266	−535	−582
St Mary	+5 507	−579	−776	−679
St Ann	+931	−804	−785	−666
Trelawny	−206	−443	−547	−420
St James	−894	−586	+1527	+2569
Hanover	−792	−650	−651	−688
West Moreland	−683	−772	−809	−731
St Elizabeth	−915	−812	−782	−540
Manchester	−1 133	−982	−712	−615
Clarendon	+18 541	−41	+1200	−443
St Catherine	+1 395	−310	+7964	+1902

NOTE: The exceedingly high sex ratios for St Thomas and Clarendon (1911–1921) are due to the small numbers involved (776/6 and 686/37). Conversely, the sex ratio of −41 (Clarendon 1921–1943) is due to a positive balance of +113 for men and a negative balance of −2763 for women.
Source: Roberts 1957: 145–148 (Periods 1911–1921 and 1921–1943)
Hewitt 1974: 35–38 (Periods 1943–1960 and 1960–1970)

Table 20 Dominican Republic, Guadeloupe and Martinique: proportions of nuclear households and sex ratios according to area of residence

Area of residence	Dominican Republic		Guadeloupe and Martinique	
	Nuclear households[a]	Sex ratios[b]	Nuclear households[c]	Sex ratios[d]
Urban	68.9	681	64.7	707
Rural	75.4	843	70.8	773

[a]All nuclear households (including vertically and laterally extended) in percentage of all households.
[b]M (20–49) per 1000 F (15–44) at the census of 1970.
[c]All nuclear households (including polynuclear) in percentage of all households.
[d]M (20–49) per 1000 F (15–44) at the census of 1974.
Source: Dominican Republic: Kabir 1980: 54; Republica Dominica en cifras 1978: 15–16
Guadeloupe–Martinique: Guadeloupe–Martinique Fertility Survey and INSEE

instability of common-law unions, it is generally assumed that men are marginal and that common-law women, more frequently than married women, are heads of households. A weaker correlation implies that the access of common-law women to the status of heads of households is less determined by the deficit of males. In other words, in a given population, the fact that a common-law woman is or is not the head of the household also depends on other socio-cultural factors, such as her social status. It is generally low in Jamaica: this would explain why, in figure 2, Jamaica is now close to Trinidad and Guyana, and far from Montserrat: although the deficit of males is the same, Jamaican women are less often declared as heads of households. We should be cautious with this sort of argument. Whereas sociological literature on Jamaican mating patterns is fairly rich, nothing is known about Montserrat.

5.4 SEX RATIOS AND FAMILY STRUCTURES: REGIONAL AND LOCAL DATA

We cannot rule out the possibility that the average sex ratios displayed in table 18 result from quite different values at the local level. If sex-selective internal migrations took place, their consequences on family structures could have been comparable to an emigration from the country. Therefore, correlations at least as strong should be found at the local level. As a matter of fact, an important rural exodus took place in the four main units studied in this paper.

In the Dominican Republic, the urban population increased by 10.7 times between 1920 and 1970, as opposed to 3.2 for the rural population. Its share of the total population grew from 16.6 to 40 per cent (Republica Dominicana 1976: 11). In 1970, the sex ratio was 843 in towns and 681 in the rural milieu.

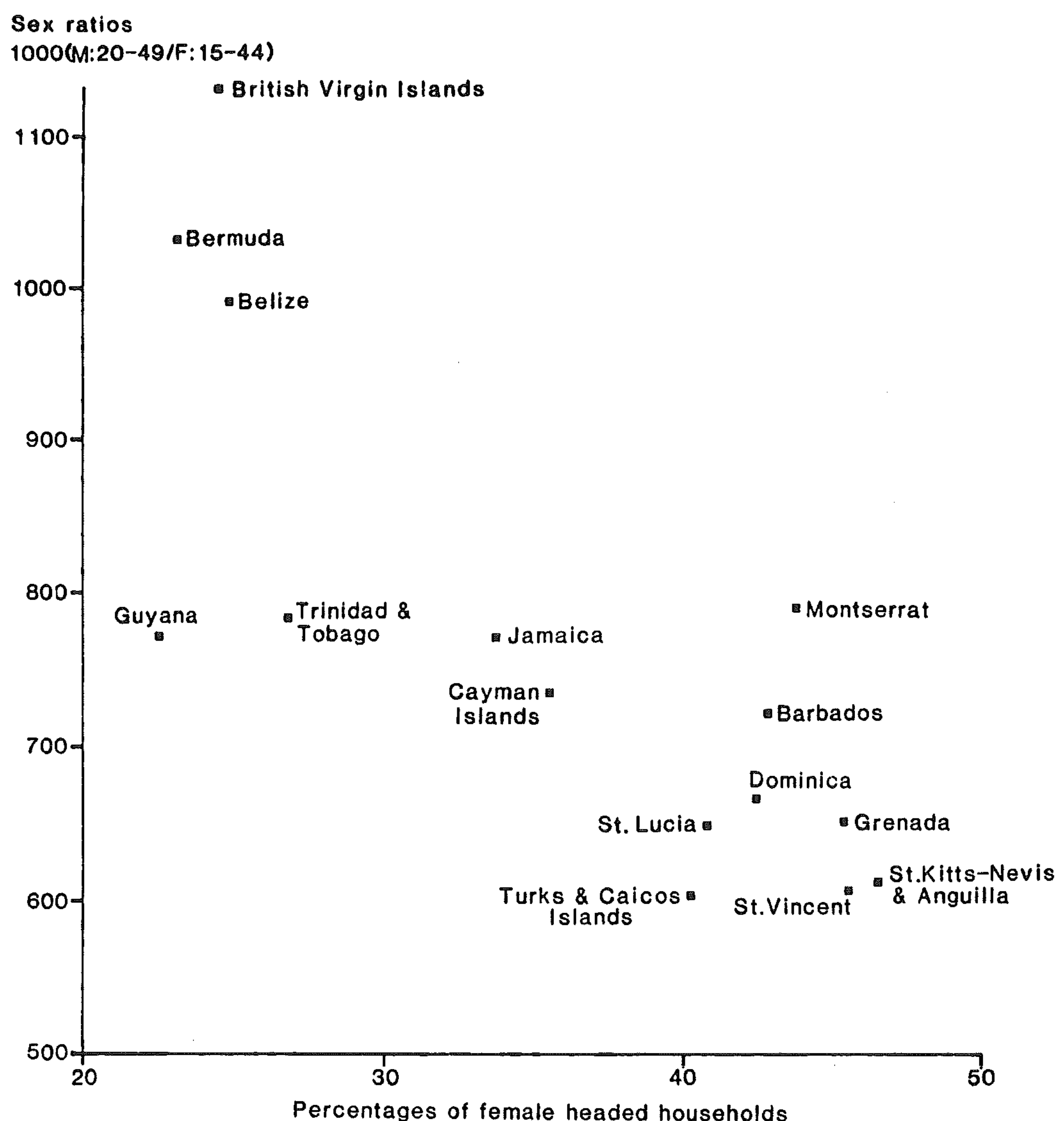

Figure 1 Commonwealth Caribbean: percentages of female-headed households and sex ratios (census of 1970)

In Guadeloupe and Martinique, the rural exodus was important between the censuses of 1967 and 1974: small rural communes even lost population in Martinique; in both islands, the rate of growth of the major towns was much higher than the average of the 'département' (Charbit and Leridon 1980: 17–20). At the census of 1974, the urban and rural sex ratios were respectively 707 and 773.[18]

In Guyana, urban population increased from 25 to 29.4 per cent of the total population between 1931 and 1970 (Guyana Fertility Survey: I,6).

Thanks to Roberts and Hewitt, Jamaican internal migrations are very well known. The sex distribution of migrants is available for each parish for the whole period 1911–1970. As shown by table 19, the sex ratios are unbalanced. Between 1911 and 1943, mainly women migrated to Kingston and Saint Andrew, and to the neighbouring parishes of Clarendon and Saint Catherine. On the other hand, the banana-producing areas of Portland, Saint Mary and Saint Thomas attracted males between 1911 and 1921 (Roberts 1957: 144–158). Between 1943 and 1970, female migration to Saint Andrew continued, whereas the growth of the tourism industry in Saint James and the bauxite extraction in Clarendon and Saint Catherine initiated an inflow of males (Hewitt 1974: 34–41).

For lack of regional data, analysis in the Dominican Republic is confined to urban–rural differences. In Guadeloupe and Martinique, too, the size of the sample does not allow correlation of sex ratios and family structures for each of the 68 communes, and only urban–rural comparisons will be made. Lower sex ratios in towns correspond to a lesser frequency of nuclear households (table 20). In Guadeloupe and Martinique, the relative variation in the sex ratio (9.3 per cent) is almost the same as the variation in the proportion of nuclear households (9.4 per cent). In the Dominican Republic, the variations

[18]The urban–rural distinction is not the standard one, in order to allow for a more refined analysis of socio-geographical differences. The 'urban' communes are those which are directly influenced by the major towns (Fort-de-France, Pointe-à-Pitre, Basse-Terre), as far as employment, transport, housing, medical and social services are concerned (Charbit and Leridon 1980: 216).

Table 21 Guyana: distribution of women by type of household and area of residence. Sex ratios at the census of 1970

Area of residence	Type of households							All		Sex ratio[a]
	Matrifocal	Quasi-matrifocal	Non-matrifocal, non-nuclear	Nuclear simple	Nuclear extended	Poly-nuclear	Other	per cent	N	
Georgetown	2.2	4.0	23.0	30.2	24.8	4.8	11.0	100.0	400	717
Suburbs of Georgetown	2.3	1.6	17.4	35.9	27.8	3.6	11.4	100.0	860	716
New Amsterdam	1.5	0.7	22.6	35.1	27.7	3.6	8.8	100.0	137	657
Linden	0.5	4.9	14.6	38.4	35.1	1.1	5.4	100.0	185	910
All urban	2.0	2.5	18.9	34.7	27.9	3.6	10.4	100.0	1582	
Remote area	1.1	–	11.8	46.2	33.3	5.4	2.2	100.0	93	(–)
West Berbice	2.5	1.0	7.4	45.8	28.1	9.8	5.4	100.0	203	702
East Bank Demerara	1.4	0.4	10.0	50.2	24.4	9.5	4.1	100.0	221	790
Essequibo	0.6	0.6	10.1	56.5	18.9	9.5	3.8	100.0	338	758
West Demerara	0.7	0.8	10.9	51.4	24.1	8.5	3.6	100.0	589	762
East Coast Demerara	0.5	1.2	10.4	48.5	24.2	10.0	5.2	100.0	739	727
East Berbice	0.8	0.7	7.2	58.1	22.4	6.2	4.6	100.0	851	790
All rural	0.9	0.8	9.3	52.5	23.7	8.4	4.4	100.0	3034	
All Guyana	1.3	1.4	12.6	46.4	25.1	6.8	6.4	100.0	4616	

[a]M (20–49) per 1000 F (15–44) at the census of 1970. NOTE: (–) Unreliable data.

Table 22 Guyana: distribution of African women by type of household and area of residence. Sex ratios at the census of 1970

Area of residence	Type of households							All		Sex ratio[a]
	Matrifocal	Quasi-matrifocal	Non-matrifocal, non-nuclear	Nuclear simple	Nuclear extended	Poly-nuclear	Other	per cent	N	
Georgetown	3.5	1.7	30.6	19.7	29.5	1.7	13.3	100.0	173	717
Suburbs of Georgetown	3.5	1.6	23.4	25.5	29.5	2.8	13.7	100.0	424	716
New Amsterdam	2.4	1.2	25.6	24.4	36.6	2.5	7.3	100.0	82	657
Linden	0.7	4.9	14.0	37.7	35.7	1.4	5.6	100.0	143	910
All urban	2.9	2.2	23.5	26.3	31.3	2.3	11.5	100.0	822	
Remote area	2.9	–	14.7	26.5	50.0	–	5.9	100.0	34	(–)
West Berbice	5.5	1.4	10.9	26.0	32.9	9.6	13.7	100.0	73	702
East Bank Demerara	–	2.1	18.7	35.4	33.3	8.3	2.1	100.0	48	790
Essequibo	2.2	–	17.4	45.6	26.1	–	8.7	100.0	46	758
West Demerara	1.6	2.4	20.6	33.3	31.8	3.2	7.1	100.0	126	762
East Coast Demerara	1.4	1.4	22.3	29.0	27.2	8.9	9.8	100.0	224	727
East Berbice	4.9	1.6	13.8	41.5	29.3	2.4	6.5	100.0	123	790
All rural	2.5	1.5	18.3	33.2	30.6	5.6	8.3	100.0	674	
All African	2.7	1.9	21.1	29.4	31.0	3.8	10.1	100.0	1496	

[a]M (20–49) per 1000 F (15–44) at the census of 1970. NOTE: (–) Unreliable data.

Table 23 Guyana: distribution of Indian women by type of household and area of residence. Sex ratios at the census of 1970

Area of residence	Type of households							All		Sex ratio[a]
	Matrifocal	Quasi-matrifocal	Non-matrifocal, non-nuclear	Nuclear simple	Nuclear extended	Poly-nuclear	Other	per cent	N	
Georgetown	–	8.3	13.8	43.1	18.3	10.1	6.4	100.0	109	717
Suburbs of Georgetown	1.1	0.4	7.2	52.1	25.6	3.8	9.8	100.0	265	716
New Amsterdam	–	–	17.8	46.6	17.8	6.7	11.1	100.0	45	657
Linden	–	–	33.3	16.7	33.3	–	16.7	100.0	6	910
All urban	0.7	2.3	10.4	48.7	23.1	5.6	9.2	100.0	425	
Remote area	–	–	11.1	55.6	33.3	–	–	100.0	9	(–)
West Berbice	0.9	–	3.5	63.7	20.4	11.5	–	100.0	113	702
East Bank Demerara	1.9	–	6.2	55.3	22.4	9.9	4.3	100.0	161	790
Essequibo	–	0.8	9.0	60.1	16.5	11.5	2.1	100.0	243	758
West Demerara	0.5	0.4	8.2	56.0	21.8	10.4	2.7	100.0	441	768
East Coast Demerara	–	0.9	3.2	58.4	23.7	11.0	2.8	100.0	464	727
East Berbice	0.1	0.6	6.2	60.8	21.0	7.1	4.2	100.0	706	790
All rural	0.3	0.6	6.2	58.9	21.3	9.6	3.1	100.0	2137	
All Indians	0.4	0.9	6.9	57.2	21.6	8.9	4.1	100.0	2562	

[a]M (20–49) per 1000 F (15–44) at the census of 1970.
NOTE: (–) Unreliable data.

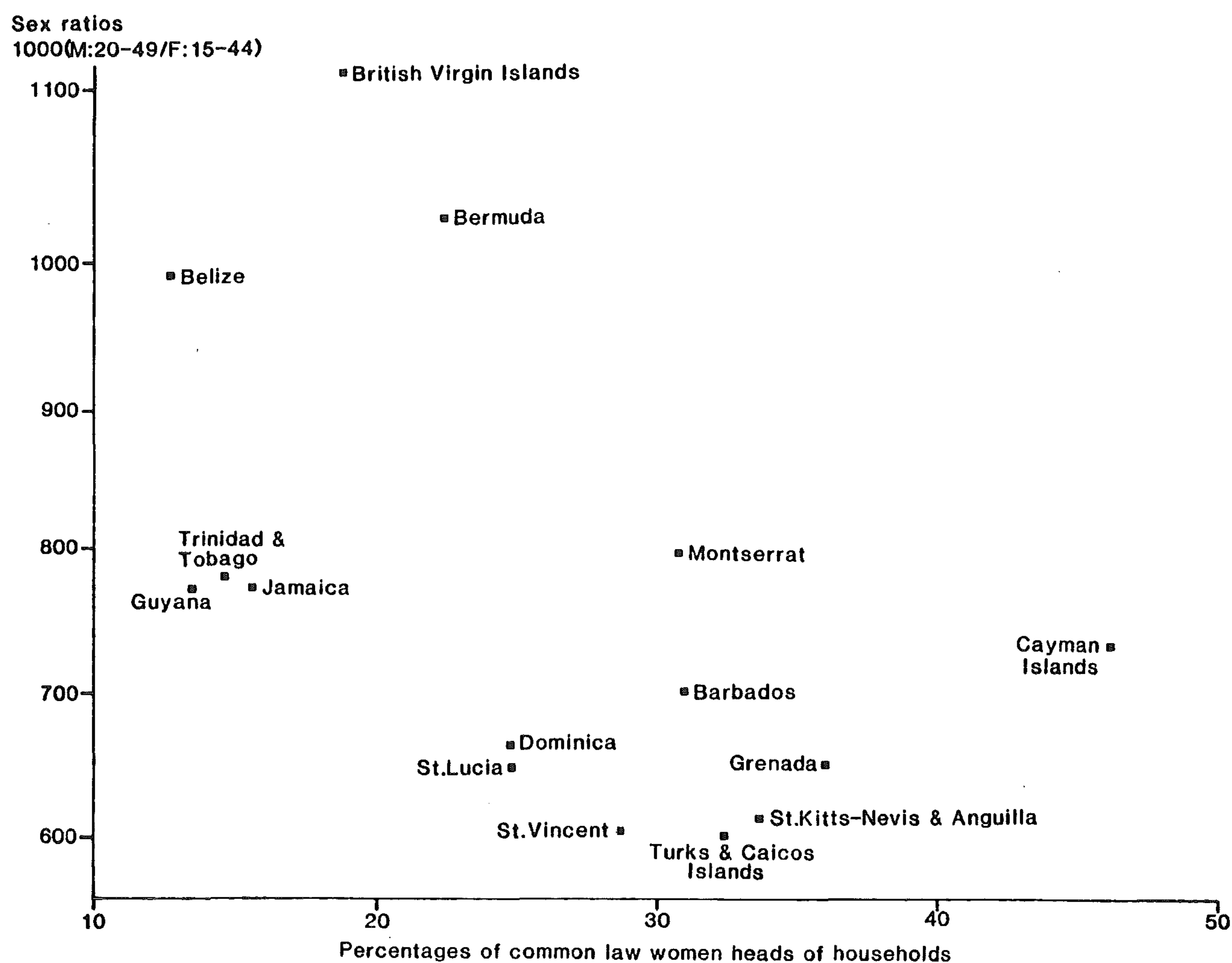

Figure 2 Commonwealth Caribbean: percentages of common-law women heads of households and sex ratios (census of 1970)

Table 24 Jamaica: distribution of women by type of household and parish of residence. Sex ratios at the census of 1970

Parish of residence	Single women heads of household	Nuclear households	Other households	All		Sex ratios[a]
				per cent	N	
Kingston	28.4	57.4	14.2	100.0	148	699
St Andrew	20.7	59.9	19.4	100.0	881	694
St Thomas	25.0	52.9	22.1	100.0	68	816
Portland	20.6	62.9	16.5	100.0	97	816
St Mary	17.7	62.7	19.6	100.0	153	811
St Ann	12.7	71.7	15.6	100.0	166	792
Trelawny	19.4	67.2	13.4	100.0	67	881
St James	17.6	69.8	12.6	100.0	182	791
Hanover	18.0	67.2	14.8	100.0	61	788
Westmoreland	14.8	72.2	13.0	100.0	169	778
St Elizabeth	16.0	70.7	13.3	100.0	181	831
Manchester	18.1	64.3	17.6	100.0	182	803
Clarendon	13.7	68.4	17.9	100.0	256	853
St Catherine	17.9	63.5	18.6	100.0	485	774
Jamaica	18.5	64.2	17.3	100.0	3096	767

[a]Male (20–49) per 1000 F (15–44).

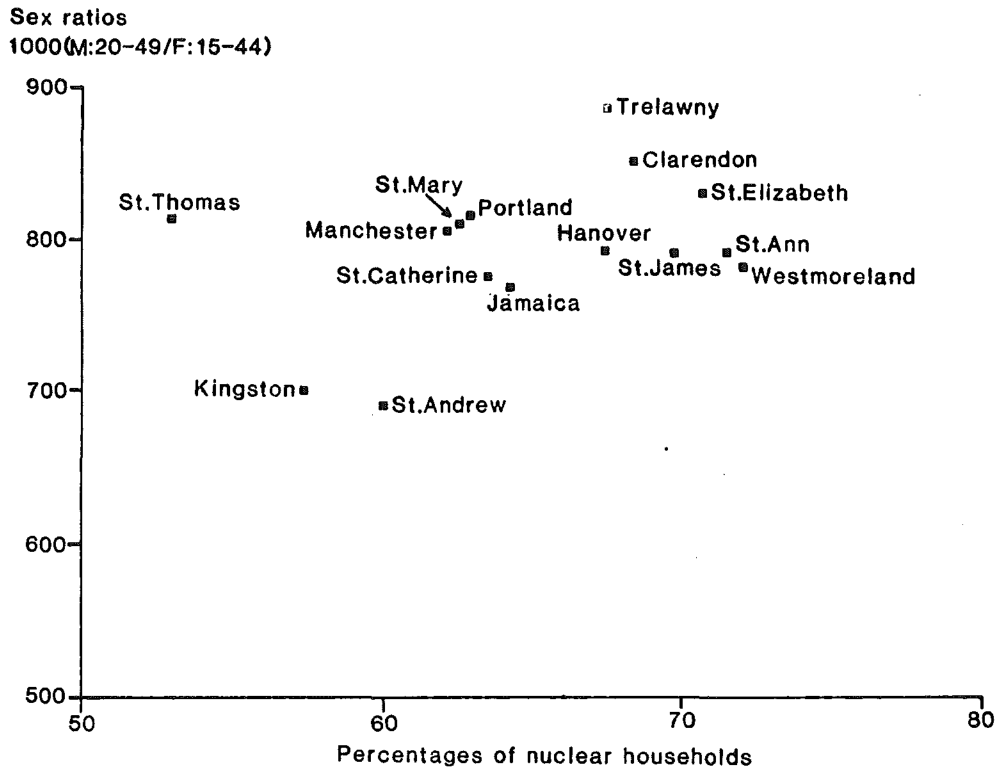

Figure 3 Jamaica: percentages of nuclear households and sex ratios (census of 1970)

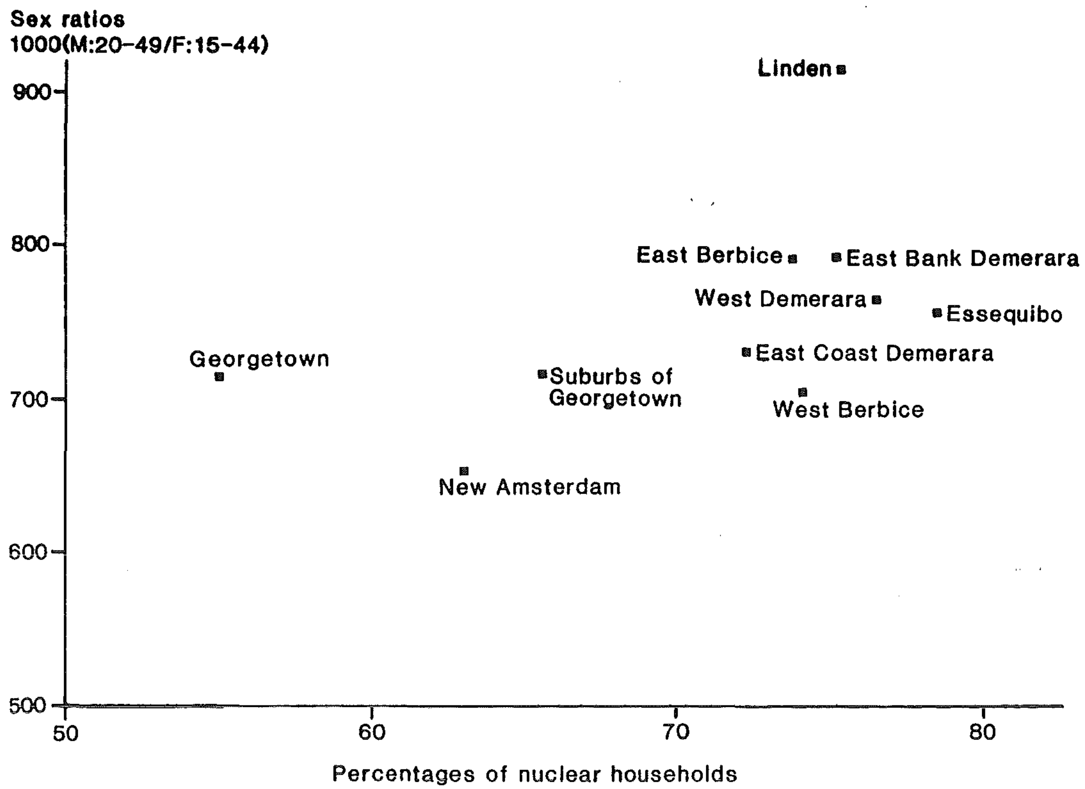

Figure 4 Guyana: percentages of nuclear households and sex ratios (census of 1970)

are much more loosely tied: 23.7 per cent for the sex ratio, 9.4 per cent for the population of nuclear households.

For Guyana (table 21) and Jamaica (table 24), much more refined data is available. The Guyanese sample is also broken down by ethnic groups (Indians and Africans, tables 22 and 23). The sex ratios at the time of the surveys being unavailable, those calculated on the basis of the 1970 census are used, with the same age groups as above (20–49 for men; 15–44 for women). The sex ratios observed in the Jamaican parishes and in the Guyanese regions which were surveyed in the national fertility surveys are correlated with the series of percentages of all nuclear households (simple, extended, polynuclear) in the corresponding parishes and regions.

For the whole of Guyana, r is equal to +0.310. Unfortunately, sex ratios for each ethnic group not being available, it is not possible to calculate the appropriate correlations. If we correlate the percentages of nuclear households in the African subsample with the overall sex ratios (all ethnic groups), the r coefficient is better: +0.618, the confidence interval being smaller than 5 per cent. This is because we have introduced a bias by selecting those women more likely to belong to non-nuclear households because of their ethnic origin.

In Jamaica, the correlation is not much better: +0.362 (not significant at the 5 per cent level). These results confirm the fragility of the sex ratio argument. When the analysis is carried further, notably at the level of geographical units corresponding more adequately to the real socio-economic conditions in which the people live (for instance, mating partners, whether husbands or visiting partners, are more likely to be chosen within narrow geographical and social milieus), family structures appear to be only marginally influenced by demographic constraints, as is clearly shown by the scattergrams on figures 3 and 4.

As M.G. Smith pointed out, mating patterns are much more important as a factor than the sex ratios (1966: XXVI–XXVII). Suppose that because of a reversal of the migratory flow, the number of men increases in a population in which the surplus of women was until then reflected by the high proportion of female-headed households. This proportion will only partly be affected by changes in the sex ratio if the distribution of returning migrants in the various types of households is the same as that of the non-migrant population.

Under such conditions, the decisive factors are indeed mating choices and behaviours, and not the sex ratios, which appear as a necessary but not a sufficient condition. As M.G. Smith wrote: 'increases or decreases in the adult sex ratios depend for their familial effects on the local patterns of mating, kinship and domestic organization which accommodate them and regulate their effects' (ibid: XXVI).

This opinion can be statistically confirmed. The slopes of the regression lines are 0.43 in Guyana and 0.40 in Jamaica, meaning that a given diminution in the sex ratios does not induce a proportional diminution in the proportion of nuclear households. The frequency of such households is thus only partly determined by the sex ratios. Similarly, the r coefficient between the sex ratios and the proportions of female-headed households displayed in table 17 is 0.45. The case of the Bermudas and Belize is striking: although the sex ratio at mating ages is almost balanced (986 and 1022), nearly one-fourth of the households (24.8 and 23.3 per cent) are headed by women.

6 Conclusion

Despite the unique Caribbean mating patterns, and especially the high proportions of common-law unions, with their corollary high rates of illegitimate births, family structures are fairly stable and to a certain extent comparable to Western models. Residential matrifocality (the grandmother and the mother, both being single, and the grandchildren living under the same roof) is marginal. Single-female-headed households, though more frequent, are far less numerous than households headed by a man, which almost always correspond to the nuclear family.

To account for this contradiction, it is tempting to argue that the effects of slavery, which are supposed to have induced matrifocality, faded with time. However, it is among the rural masses, who are reputed to be closer to the social structures shaped by the plantation economy, that nuclear households are the most frequent. Moreover, statistical data, though scanty, strongly suggest that other forms of family patterns than matrifocality were compatible with slavery: at the beginning of the 19th century, large majorities of slaves living on estates were living in families, whereas matrifocality never was the dominant model.

If these figures are representative of the Caribbean slave family patterns, matrifocality must be regarded as a family form produced by later socio-economic changes. The intense emigrations, whether regional or directed to North and Central America and to Europe, have been considered a decisive factor: with deeply disturbed sex ratios, the formation of female-headed households was unavoidable. Nor is this interpretation satisfactory: when the level of analysis is more precise than the nation or the island, correlations become very weak.

The only reliable conclusion to be drawn from the confrontation of the historical, sociological, anthropological methods is that cultural and sociological factors shape family patterns at least as much as demographic constraints. On the other hand, the demographic and historical approaches are most helpful in inviting the sociologist to be cautious in his generalizations.

Our long and detailed examination of available evidence finally leads to the disappointing conclusion that none of the methods of investigation can fully describe the reality. Because family patterns are of a quantitative and qualitative nature statistical and non-statistical methods should simultaneously be used. What is now needed is an investigation into the cultural and social aspects of family patterns which is free from bias in favour of matrifocality. From this point of view at least, the contribution of demographers is constructive as a quantitative approach can temper the intuitions of the socio-anthropologists. The case of R.T. Smith's major book on British Guyana is a revealing illustration of this problem.

He constantly emphasizes the central role of the mother and the strength of the maternal bond (1956: 61, 65–69, 103, 113, 115, 120–121, 142–147). He refers precisely to relational matrifocality and does not stick to the narrow residential criterion we have used. However, in his description of the life cycle, Smith dwells upon the importance of the father's image. The acknowledgement of fatherhood goes far beyond its legal aspects, since 'it is a social norm of great importance that every individual must have a mother and father. Even the most promiscuous young woman has a pretty good idea ... who is most likely to be the father of her child, and even if the man refuses to recognize paternity, and the girl does not ask the court to establish it, there is still an overwhelming tendency for a father to be assigned to the child by public gossip. In any case, where a child is born to an unmarried woman, the name of the father is omitted from the official register of births even where the man clearly recognizes paternity. In a few marginal cases, the father himself may go to register the birth of the child and insist that his name is entered, but this is extremely rare. Where paternity is recognized then the child is almost always known by the father's surname. In a few cases the child takes the mother's surname, but even in these cases when the child gets older it will have a father assigned to it even if it never sees him, or knows very little about him, or is not even sure of his name. In short, it is inconceivable that a child should be fatherless, no matter how vague the father-figure may be, and in the overwhelming majority of cases the father is known and recognized by the whole community even if he does not support the child and does not live in the village' (R.T. Smith 1956: 133).

In spite of all this, the father's role in the relational family network and in the everyday life of the household is regarded by Smith as only marginal even when the father–husband is the head of the household (ibid 1956: 61, 147–150). This paradox is explained according to two lines of interpretation.

First, the mother–child relationship is so intense, with a strong psychological investment, that the father is factually and symbolically marginalized. This is the traditional stereotype of the 'irresponsibility' of Caribbean males and one of the 'explanations' of the perpetuation of this irresponsibility. Because the mother cannot rely on her temporary partners, she reinforces her relationships with her children, which inevitably weakens their relationship with their father. This purely psychological argument does not fit with the social importance of the father's image which Smith emphasizes unless it is assumed that the maternal bond is overvalued because of other purely socio-cultural (and not psychological) factors, and especially the family disintegration inherited from slavery, for which the search for a satisfactory

father image cannot compensate. This argument is not convincing, since the slave partners-fathers were far from being absent from the households, as historical research has shown. Furthermore, even if historical evidence is considered inconclusive and if it is held that slave males were marginal, this interpretation nevertheless fails to take into account the fact that slavery ended 150 years ago, and that from then onwards the white nuclear family, with the strong status and roles attributed to the male head of household, was consistently taken as a reference model in the West Indies. The main weakness of the interpretation based on slavery is precisely to ignore several decades of colonization.

Secondly, the importance of relational matrifocality can be explained by that of residential matrifocality. In short, the argument states that because the male head is absent, the mother is obliged to assume both mother and father roles. Such is Blake's opinion. Unfortunately, residential matrifocality is proportionally in the minority, whereas nuclear households, whether extended or confined to the biological family, are by far the most frequent.

The implications of the statistical approach are worth stressing. If the nuclear family is the modal pattern, and if men are physically present, Smith's contradictions vanish. The father is quite understandably an important figure if, far from being marginal, he generally lives in the household. The importance of the nuclear family as a reference model makes sense if figures show that it is a pattern shared by the bulk of the population; indeed, the influence of colonization must be quoted here and opposed to that of slavery. A last implication is that the mother-children bond is perhaps not as strong as is usually believed, especially if single mothers receive some economic support from their partners. It is striking that surveys conducted in Jamaica revealed that even former visiting partners maintained close ties with the mothers and contributed to the upbringing of their children (Roberts and Sinclair 1978: 53–59; Stycos and Back 1964: 337–338). In Martinique, mothers who are most representative of Caribbean patterns, having children of several partners, also mention the help given to them by former partners (Charbit forthcoming).

The question remains: why is there such contradiction between statistical data and the dominant sociological views on Caribbean families?

First, the contemporaries' unawareness of the reality of slave families can be explained by the fact that the Whites generalized on the basis of the patterns of those slaves they knew best, their domestic servants and the slaves living in towns; whereas the estate, when exploitation was not merciless as in Trinidad, allowed some stability of the families.

Equally surprising is the importance of matrifocality in the socio-anthropological literature, especially if it is recalled that several monographs concluded that matrifocality was not the most frequent model. For instance, in Providencia, which P.T. Wilson studied in 1958–1959, in spite of a sex ratio of 573 in the 15–49 age group, 66 per cent of heads of households were males, and in the whole sample, regardless of the sex of the head, 66.4 per cent of the households contained a married or common-law conjugal pair (Wilson 1961: 520). In Martinique, two studies by Kreiselman (1958: 151, 179 as quoted by Henry and Wilson 1975: 182); and Slater (1977: 34) found that nuclear households were far more frequent. In Anguilla, where heavily sex-selective emigration took place, Walker noticed that women continued to declare their partners as heads of household, even if they had been absent for a long time (as quoted by Henry and Wilson 1975: 173). And above all Clarke, whose monograph was a decisive contribution to matrifocality, found in her samples 71 per cent of nuclear families (Clarke 1957: 191–194). The striking title of her book — *My Mother who Fathered me* — became famous; her figures were forgotten.

Among the important contributions to matrifocality Cumper's survey of 1296 Barbadian households must be quoted. It showed that female-headed households were over-represented in some occupations, especially among people working in services and among own-account workers. In other occupations, nuclear households are the rule (Cumper 1961: 388–403). The influence of socio-economic factors on family structures has in fact rarely been studied, but it should be noted that Smith, who with Clarke played an important role in the elaboration of the matrifocal concept, found it necessary to add nuance to his thesis four years after the publication of his major book: the father's role and authority are considerably strengthened if he economically contributes to the family (Smith 1975: 98).[19] Solien Gonzalez introduced the same nuance about the 'Black Caribs' of Belize (1969: 62–63).

One may wonder why these monographs of rural communities, sometimes characterized by heavy emigrations yet pointing out the relative rareness of matrifocality, did not catch the attention of specialists. Similarly, why was so little research done on the economic factors?

If it is kept in mind that socio-anthropological research focused on the rural, poor and black segments of the population (Benoist 1975: 10; Rubin 1975: 148; Schlesinger 1968a: 137; 1968b: 150), it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the information gathered by the above quoted monographs was ignored because it ran counter to accepted views on matrifocality. Similarly, the study of the influence of socio-economic factors necessarily led to a reconsideration of the generalization on matrifocality based on very specific samples.

The problem at stake then becomes that of the ideological aspects of matrifocality and of the unjustified place it occupies in socio-anthropological research. As M.G. Smith strongly put it, concerning the 'grandmother families'[20] which Henriques had stressed in his 1953 book, 'Theories which have assumed the central position of the maternal grandmother, or the modal distribution of "grandmother families" in the British Caribbean thus need little attention. Neither does the maternal grandmother occupy a central position nor is the "grandmother family" the modal family form. Con-

[19]We are quoting here the translation of a 1960 paper.

[20]This form of matrifocality is defined as a household in which the children of a woman are given to the grandmother, who brings them up, the woman herself living elsewhere because of her job.

sequently, those historical, cultural, structural and psychological theories developed with such care to "explain" this peculiar family system are primarily of value as items in the history of social thought' (M.G. Smith 1962: 218). From this point of view the question of the origins of matrifocality is indeed extremely important.

Although it was partly caused by post-slavery emigrations and partly by pure cultural factors, it was ideologically necessary to lay the emphasis on slavery and to set up the corollary theory of persistence. By asserting that a family model different from the European white model existed, and that it functioned well, Caribbean societies were so to speak legitimized, and they could no longer be regarded as deviant. Slavery had produced something positive, which concerned an essential and highly sensitive aspect of Caribbean societies, the functioning of families. We are taken back to the debate sparked off in the 1940s.

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Appendix A — Using Data on Family Structure from the Guyana Fertility Survey

As shown by the listing of the eight basic types (see p 12), a double classification is in fact used in the household survey. Apart from the individual households (category 1), complete families are distinguished from incomplete families (categories 2 and 7 as opposed to 3 and 6); and persons of kin are opposed to those not of kin (categories 4 and 5 as opposed to 8).

For lack of more precise information, we must presume some hierarchy in the classification of the members of the households. Complete and incomplete families are regarded as the main nucleus, to which isolated individuals are aggregated. For instance, in the case of a nephew living in the family of his uncle and aunt, the household should normally be described as a nuclear family which is not simple but extended. As a matter of fact, a close study of the 72 combinations of the 8 basic units shows that the complete or incomplete family is always given primacy of rank.

We have thus reduced the 72 items to the following eight:

1 Single-person households.
2 Simple nuclear households (a couple with or without children, with nobody else living in the household).
3 Extended nuclear households (a couple with children or childless, with persons of kin and/or persons not of kin living in the household).
4 Simple single-parent families (a single father or mother living alone with his(her) children).
5 Extended single-parent families (a single father or mother with children and living with persons of kin and/or persons not of kin, for instance the grandmother of the children and a maid).
6 Simple polynuclear households.
7 Extended polynuclear households.
8 Other households, containing persons of kin or not of kin.

A basic choice should now be made. Suppose that a given household contains a couple with adult children, and that one of the children has young children. Should we list the complete family (the couple with children) or the incomplete family (the daughter or son with a baby)? In other words, which nucleus should be regarded as the main one: are we dealing with an extended nuclear household or with an extended single-parent family?

Out of the 4666 persons of the sample, 1875 belong to simple nuclear families (category 2) and 359 to simple complete families (category 3), the combination of both basic units being computed in only 92 instances. It seems therefore reasonable to count the complete family, mainly in view of the likely age difference: the head of household is probably older, and is therefore the married man (or woman), whereas the single parent is probably younger.

All the extended single-parent families are not strictly speaking matrifocal households, since the extension can be due to non-parents, or to parents who cannot be precisely identified. However, the information on the sex-and-age distribution of the household population can be of some help. For instance, the household is unlikely to be matrifocal if it includes men aged 50 and over. On the other hand, the exclusion of households with no male aged 15–49 is too strict a condition since a single woman head of household can have a son aged 16.[21]

The household may be matrifocal if it contains at least one woman above the age of 49. But for lack of precise information on the relationship of the interviewed woman to the head of household, as is the case in the Guadeloupe–Martinique survey, it is by no means certain that the household is composed of three generations in the mother's direct line. The other woman may be a relative, but not the grandmother. Or the head of household might be the woman belonging to the middle generation, as was sometimes the case in the Guadeloupe–Martinique data.

In view of these ambiguities, it seemed advisable to crosscheck the household survey data with those of the individual questionnaire. The important category of single women heads of households (non-nuclear, non-matrifocal households) has thus been defined in two different ways, using first the household survey variable 'composition of the household', and second the union status and birth history variables of the individual questionnaire. First, the household contains a simple or extended single-parent family and the head of household is a woman; there is no woman over 50 years in the household (otherwise it would be matrifocal). Secondly, the head of household is a woman; the interviewed woman is single or has a visiting partner; she has children; there is no woman aged above 50 in the household.

The percentages of women satisfying these conditions are 12.6 (household survey) and 14.1 (individual questionnaire). Although not quite in agreement, these ratios may be regarded as satisfactory, in so far as the information gathered in the household survey is probably less

[21]If however this condition was not kept, the risk of computing as matrifocal a household in which the male aged 15–49 is in fact the husband (and which is therefore a nuclear household) would be limited, since the computation is confined to households headed by women. Finally, the allowance for males aged 15–49 tends to over-estimate matrifocality.

complete.[22] They are also consistent with the proportion of women single or visiting and having children or childless, which amounts to 18.7 per cent (Guyana Fertility Survey, table 2.2.2.6), as some of these women belong to nuclear households.

The first definition has been used. Although slightly less discriminant, it permits us to assess the frequency of what is described as the non-matrifocal, non-nuclear households and to discern whether the single woman head of household is childless or not (categories C of table 3).

[22]Since the women were not always personally interviewed, some of the single-parent families may have been underestimated, for instance if the servant had just mentioned that the head of household was a woman, while suppressing the fact that she had children. The same single woman head of household, when reinterviewed in the individual survey, surely mentioned her children.

Appendix B — Coding of Family Structures in the Guyana Fertility Survey

000 = Single person household.
001 = 1 complete family, ie father, mother and their children or father and mother and no children.
002 = 1 incomplete family, ie father or mother with his or her children.
004 = Children of either spouse.
008 = Relations — cousins, aunts, grandmother etc.
016 = 2 or more incomplete families.
032 = 2 or more complete families.
064 = Persons other than family members but not relatives.

Combinations

003 = 001 + 002	= 1 complete family and 1 incomplete family.
005 = 001 + 004	= 1 complete family and children of either spouse.
006 = 002 + 004	= 1 incomplete family and children of either spouse.
007 = 002 + 001 + 004	= 1 incomplete family and 1 complete family and children of either spouse.
009 = 001 + 008	= 1 complete family and relations.
010 = 002 + 008	= 1 incomplete family and relations.
011 = 001 + 002 + 008	= 1 complete family and 1 incomplete family and relations.
012 = 004 + 008	= Children of either spouse and relations.
013 = 004 + 001 + 008	= 1 complete family and children of either spouse and relations.
014 = 002 + 004 + 008	= 1 incomplete family and children of either spouse and relations.
015 = 001 + 002 + 004 + 008	= 1 complete family and 1 incomplete family and children of either spouse and relations.
017 = 001 + 016	= 1 complete family and 2 or more incomplete families.
020 = 004 + 016	= Children of either spouse and 2 or more incomplete families.
021 = 001 + 004 + 016	= 1 complete family and children of either spouse and 2 or more incomplete families.
024 = 008 + 016	= Relations and 2 or more incomplete families.
025 = 001 + 008 + 016	= 1 complete family and relations and 2 or more incomplete families.
028 = 004 + 008 + 016	= Children of either spouse and relations and 2 or more incomplete families.
029 = 001 + 004 + 008 + 016	= 1 complete family and children of either spouse and relations and 2 or more incomplete families.
034 = 032 + 002	= 2 or more complete families and 1 incomplete family.
036 = 032 + 004	= 2 or more complete families and children of either spouse.
038 = 032 + 004 + 002	= 2 or more complete families and children of either spouse and 1 incomplete family.
040 = 032 + 008	= 2 or more complete families and relations.
042 = 032 + 008 + 002	= 2 or more complete families and 1 incomplete family and relations.
044 = 032 + 008 + 004	= 2 or more complete families and children of either spouse and relations.
046 = 032 + 008 + 004 + 002	= 2 or more complete families and relations and children of either spouse and 1 incomplete family.
048 = 032 + 016	= 2 or more complete families and 2 or more incomplete families.
052 = 032 + 016 + 004	= 2 or more complete families and 2 or more incomplete families and children of either spouse.
056 = 032 + 016 + 008	= 2 or more complete families and 2 or more incomplete families and relations.
060 = 032 + 016 + 008 + 004	= 2 or more complete families and 2 or more incomplete families and relations and children of either spouse.
065 = 064 + 001	= Persons other than family members but not relatives and 1 complete family.
066 = 064 + 002	= Persons other than family members and 1 incomplete family.
067 = 064 + 002 + 001	= Persons other than family members and 1 complete family and 1 incomplete family.
068 = 064 + 004	= Persons other than family members and children of either spouse.
069 = 064 + 004 + 001	= Persons other than family members and children of either spouse and 1 complete family.
070 = 064 + 004 + 002	= Persons other than family members and children of either spouse and 1 incomplete family.

071 = 064 + 004 + 002 + 001 = Persons other than family members and children of either spouse and 1 incomplete family and 1 complete family.

072 = 064 + 008 = Persons other than family members and relations.

073 = 064 + 008 + 001 = Persons other than family members and relations and 1 complete family.

074 = 064 + 008 + 002 = Persons other than family members and relations and 1 incomplete family.

075 = 064 + 008 + 002 + 001 = Persons other than family members and relations and 1 incomplete family and 1 complete family.

076 = 064 + 008 + 004 = Persons other than family members and relations and children of either spouse.

077 = 064 + 008 + 004 + 001 = Persons other than family members and relations and children of either spouse and 1 complete family.

078 = 064 + 008 + 004 + 002 = Persons other than family members and relations and children of either spouse and 1 incomplete family.

079 = 064 + 008 + 004 + 002 + 001 = Persons other than family members and relations and children of either spouse and 1 complete family and 1 incomplete family.

080 = 064 + 016 = Persons other than family members and 2 or more incomplete family.

081 = 064 + 016 + 001 = Persons other than family members and 2 or more incomplete families and 1 complete family.

084 = 064 + 016 + 004 = Persons other than family members and 2 or more incomplete families and children of either spouse.

085 = 064 + 016 + 004 + 001 = Persons other than family members and 2 or more incomplete families and children of either spouse and 1 complete family.

088 = 064 + 016 + 008 = Persons other than family members and 2 or more incomplete families and relations.

089 = 064 + 016 + 008 + 001 = Persons other than family members and 2 or more incomplete families and relations and 1 complete family.

092 = 064 + 016 + 008 + 004 = Persons other than family members and 2 or more incomplete families and relations and children of either spouse.

093 = 064 + 016 + 008 + 004 + 001 = Persons other than family members and 2 or more incomplete families and relations and children of either spouse and 1 complete family.

096 = 064 + 032 = Persons other than family members and 2 or more complete families.

098 = 064 + 032 + 002 = Persons other than family members and 2 or more complete families and 1 incomplete family.

100 = 064 + 032 + 004 = Persons other than family members and 2 or more complete families and children of either spouse.

102 = 064 + 032 + 004 + 002 = Persons other than family members and 2 or more complete families and children of either spouse and 1 incomplete family.

104 = 064 + 032 + 008 = Persons other than family members and 2 or more complete families and relations.

106 = 064 + 032 + 008 + 002 = Persons other than family members and 2 or more complete families and relations and 1 incomplete family.

108 = 064 + 032 + 008 + 004 = Persons other than family members and 2 or more complete families and relations and children of either spouse.

110 = 064 + 032 + 008 + 004 + 002 = Persons other than family members and 2 or more complete families and relations and children of either spouse and 1 incomplete family.

112 = 064 + 032 + 016 = Persons other than family members and 2 or more complete families and 2 or more incomplete families.

116 = 064 + 032 + 016 + 004 = Persons other than family members and 2 or more complete families and 2 or more incomplete families and children of either spouse.

120 = 064 + 032 + 016 + 008 = Persons other than family members and 2 or more complete families and 2 or more incomplete families and relations.

124 = 064 + 032 + 016 + 008 + 004 = Persons other than family members and 2 or more complete families and 2 or more incomplete families and relations and children of either spouse.