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MALE AND FEMALE: JAMAICAN MIGRANTS IN LONDON¹

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SUNY at Purchase

General Overview
of
Migrants in
England
(London)

This article explores the manner in which **Jamaican migrants' sex** affects their **migration patterns** and their **experiences in London**. Some of the **differences between male and female migrants** can be discerned in the reasons given for **emigration**; the order in which they came to **England**; the sensitivity to **prejudice**; the emphasis on **children's education and job opportunities in England**; the **maintenance of ties with relatives in Jamaica**; and the **membership rates in churches and associations**. Reasons for each of these differences are discussed. In general, the differences seem linked to overriding **sex-role patterns**: **men are the principal providers** in the family, and **women, even those who work, have major responsibilities for housework and children**.

Gender plays an important role when attempting to migrate to London and also the U.S.

To most **English people** all **West Indian migrants** not only look alike but are alike. Academic analysts have generally been more sophisticated and have noted, for example, that **island identities** are **key factors** among **West Indians in England** and that other characteristics, such as **occupation and life style**, distinguish some from others. Social scientists, like the **English people**, **admittedly** recognize the difference between **West Indian men and women**. Yet a vast number of studies of **West Indians in England**, like many studies of other migrant groups, discuss **male and female migrants** as "**the migrant**." Often, special features of women's adjustment are noted (**Bell 1969; Davison 1966; Fitzherbert 1967; Patterson 1965**) and differences between **men and women migrants** may even be mentioned or tabulated (**Davison 1966; Patterson 1965; Rex and Moore 1967**). But only rarely are **sex differences among West Indian migrants** systematically analyzed or explained. This paper begins to explore the manner in which **Jamaican migrants' sex** affects their **migration patterns** and their **experiences in London**.²

The writer will talk about the ways in which sex/gender can affect migration patterns & experience in London.

Migration Patterns

From the beginning, in the move to England itself, clearly distinct sex patterns emerge. Jamaican men and women differed in the reasons they gave for migrating and in the order in which they came to England. Seventy-three per cent of the men in the sample gave economic reasons for coming to England—to get work or to make more money, for example—as opposed to only 26 per cent of the women (cf. Rex and Moore 1967:100). And nearly 70 per cent of the women said that they came to England to join a spouse or relative; only 9 per cent of the men gave this reason. Since there was usually not enough money for husband, wife (or common-law wife), and children to emigrate together, men usually left first, accumulated funds abroad, and then sent for women and children. Thus women generally lived at first in England with their husbands (or husbands-to-be), parents, or aunts and uncles; men lived on their own or with age peers such as cousins, siblings, or friends.

MEN ARE USUALLY ENTERING THE COUNTRY TO MAKE MORE MONEY OR TO SEEK JOB OPPORTUNITIES.

WOMEN ARE USUALLY ENTER THE COUNTRY WITH CHILDREN AFTER HUSBAND HAS ACCUMULATED CASH TO TAKE CARE OF FAMILY.

MEN ARE MORE LIKELY TO GET IN THE COUNTRY BECAUSE OF ENGLAND'S LABOR NEEDS.

WOMEN OVERSEAS OR EVEN IN THE WEST-INDIES ARE ALSO INDEPENDENT AND AMBITIOUS LIKE MEN.

Several women had been reluctant to leave Jamaica but eventually submitted to pressure from their husbands, boyfriends, or relatives. No men in the sample expressed such hesitancy; rather, they were generally anxious to leave the West Indies to advance themselves.

MOST MEN DOESN'T HESITATE TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY TO IMPROVE THEMSELVES. WHILE WOMEN HESITATE TO LEAVE UNTIL THEY ARE PERSUADED BY; HUSBAND, BOYFRIEND OR FAMILY.

At first glance this migration pattern might suggest that Jamaican men are more adventurous, independent, and ambitious than Jamaican women. They leave Jamaica for foreign parts while their womenfolk trail behind. Ceri Peach's analysis of West Indian migration seems to lend support to this view. Although he argues that the demand for labor in England was the main determinant of West Indian migration, he feels that women and children showed less sensitivity in their reactions to fluctuations in the labor market since they were more dependent, as a group, on persons already established in England. "It is possible," he writes, "that women and children formed a solid core of immigrants who would come over almost irrespective of conditions in Britain (Peach 1968:93)."

It is, however, erroneous to generalize about Jamaican male-female migration patterns or to make facile assumptions about their respective personalities and orientations from these data. In the first place, Jamaican women, both at home and abroad, have tremendous ambition and desire to work and be financially independent (Foner 1975b). Jamaican women, it is true, are homemakers and mothers, and Jamaican men are the expected providers; but in Jamaica, and even

more so in England, women make significant financial contributions to their households. Differences in male-female migration patterns and sensitivity to the English labor market do not reflect, then, women's lack of ambition or independence. Nor do wage-earning opportunities in England seem significant since these in fact were available for both men and women. Rather, differences in male-female migration patterns seem to be linked to other factors. Consider child-care responsibilities. Many women, to be sure, left their children with their mothers when they went to join their husbands in England. But women's role in the family, and the fact that household duties were often eased in Jamaica by the presence of relatives, might have exerted pressure on them (particularly those with young children) to remain in Jamaica. This pressure may have been especially strong if, as I suspect, knowledge of job opportunities in England was more readily available for men than for women. Moreover, women may have had more difficulty than men in raising the rather considerable funds to pay for their passage because men received preference as the expected wage earners.

Furthermore, it is not always the case that women are dependent migrants. Since the end of the nineteenth century, many rural Jamaican women have migrated on their own to Kingston and other country towns for work. Gisela Eisner reports that large numbers of Jamaican women—responding to employment opportunities in personal services, dressmaking, and laundry work—emigrated to Cuba in the 1920s (Eisner 1961:151). It is noteworthy that the recent emigration to the United States appears to be dominated by enterprising females. It is easier for women than for men to get jobs and visas partly because of the demand for domestic labor in North American cities. Many women in the Jamaican village I studied left their families to take jobs in America; and women, rather than men, often sent for their children and husbands once they settled.

These comments suggest the enormous complexity involved in the study of male-female migration patterns. While further analysis is clearly required, it seems, however, that in certain instances Jamaican women have responded to employment opportunities, both abroad and within Jamaica, and have migrated alone and prior to their spouses.

Settling in London

In many ways men and women react similarly to life in London. Both men and women, for example, are gratified by their higher wages

WOMEN IN ENGLAND HAS THE SAME ADEQUATE JOB OPPORTUNITIES AS MEN.

I BELIEVE THAT THIS IS A STIGMA/TRADITION FROM BACK HOME WHERE WOMEN BECOME HOUSEWIVES AND THE MEN WENT OUT TO WORK.

IN TODAY'S SOCIETY WOMEN HAVE BECOME INDEPENDENT ESPECIALLY JAMAICAN WOMEN WHO GET SET AWAY TO WORK ON THEIR OWN.

IN TODAY'S WORLD WOMEN WOULD LEAVE THEIR YOUNG BABIES WITH RELATIVES SO THAT THEY COULD GO OUT TO WORK & BE INDEPENDENT AS WELL.

NB BASED ON THE READERS INFO SO FAR I CAN SEE WHERE SHE IS TRYING TO SHOW BOTH POINT OF VIEWS OF THE MAIN TOPIC WHICH ALMOST SEEMS LIKE A COMPLICATED DEBATE.

and improved living standards in England; an equal percentage of men and women voted in the 1970 general election and send remittances to Jamaica. Nevertheless, there are some interesting differences. First consider sensitivity to prejudice. Both men and women, it is true, are bitter about racial discrimination in England which blocks their job and housing opportunities and adds countless indignities to their daily lives. However, men mentioned prejudice more often than both working and non-working women in responses to several questions in the questionnaire.³

The status of Jamaican men and women in London is affected by the overwhelming importance of color. Regardless of their economic, occupational, or educational achievements, Jamaicans are defined as Black by the vast majority of English Whites (Foner 1975a). And racial discrimination, as numerous studies document, prevents Jamaicans from advancing to well-paid and high status jobs. But rather paradoxically, Jamaican women, I would argue, unlike Jamaican men, are cushioned to some extent from the bitter sting of prejudice by their role in the family. On the one hand their role as homemakers and mothers severely restricts their employment opportunities and for many is a source of considerable frustration (Foner 1975b). On the other hand though they confront and are demanded by racial prejudice, they receive prestige in the family in their valued role as mothers. Moreover, by being good mothers and homemakers they fulfill the expectations associated with women in English society. Men—although they may help in the house or with child-rearing—are relatively marginal to the complex of domestic relations. Men in English society are expected to be good family providers; Jamaican men are especially sensitive to racial prejudice because it tends to confine them to low status and rather poorly-paid jobs. And even when they advance occupationally—as several in the sample did—they are still viewed as “immigrants,” “West Indian,” or “Black.” Indeed, preliminary analysis of my data confirms the findings of others that more successful men feel most bitter about discrimination. The contradiction between these men’s occupational, income, and/or educational status, on the one hand, and their color-derived status, on the other, often leads to frustration and resentment (cf. Bagley 1970).

The fact that women are responsible for child-rearing helps to explain why female respondents tend to place greater emphasis on their children’s education. Women in the sample were more likely than men to express the desire to upgrade their children’s education; about

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION CAN BE A BIG FACTOR FOR JAMAICANS IN ENGLAND BASED ON JOB OPPORTUNITIES AND OTHER BENEFITS.

EVEN THOUGH JAMAICAN MEN AND WOMEN MAY HAVE A JOB THEIR COLOR OR RACE WOULD BLOCK THEIR PROMOTIONS.

EVEN IF THEY DO GET PROMOTED IN THEIR JOBS, THEY ARE STILL CLASSIFIED AS “BLACK” OR “IMMIGRANTS”. THIS LEADS TO FRUSTRATION.

WOMEN TEND TO RAISE A CHILD BETTER IN TERMS OF ENSURING THEY GET A GREAT EDUCATION.

HOWEVER, A FATHERLY FIG. IS VERY IMPORTANT IN A KID'S LIFE.

BOTH MEN & WOMEN THAT LIVES IN ENGLAND ~~WIVES~~ HAS EQUAL WAGES BASE ON THEIR JOBS & ALSO LIVING STANDARDS.

BECAUSE OF THE CAPABILITIES OF A WOMEN THEY TEND TO NOT GET FRUSTRATED ABOUT RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AS THE MEN WOULD DO.

one-quarter of the women said that they wanted to remain in England or were ambivalent about returning to Jamaica because educational opportunities are better in England than in Jamaica.

Furthermore, men mentioned better job opportunities in England more often than women in answers to several questions. Objectively, occupational opportunities are much better in England for both men and women; the majority of women, in fact, said that they are more independent in England than in Jamaica because in England they can work and earn a regular wage. Yet 69 per cent of the men in the sample, in contrast to 49 per cent of the working women and 35 per cent of the non-working women, said that it is easier to get a good job in England than in Jamaica. And in explaining why they planned to remain in England, men mentioned the availability of jobs in England more often than both working and non-working women. This different emphasis on job opportunities seems linked to men's role as family providers. Although Jamaican women in England usually work, men are supposed to support their families; men's readier access to jobs in England makes it easier for them to fill this expected role. Indeed, many men indicated that they would prefer their wives to stay home, but that their wives' wages are a necessary addition to the household income.

Female migrants also maintain closer emotional ties with their relatives back home. The literature on lower-class West Indian family life describes the strong bond between mothers and their children, especially daughters (e.g., Smith 1956). Jamaican women continue to have strong feelings for their mothers, even when separated by thousands of miles. Women's ties to relatives seem to contribute to pulling their loyalties homeward, particularly when no other siblings remain behind in Jamaica to care for their mothers. Although almost the same number of men and women in the sample send remittances home, 11 women (20 per cent), in contrast to two men (4 per cent), linked their desire to return to Jamaica with the wish to care for relatives. In addition, 11 women (20 per cent), in contrast to two men (4 per cent), said that they would use the money won in the football pools to help their relatives.

Finally, membership rates in associations and churches differ for men and women. Jamaican women in England, as in the West Indies, are more likely than men to attend church and they are more regular in their attendance (cf. Davison 1966:129). It is interesting that more than twice as many working women attended church as non-working

BOTH MEN AND WOMEN FROM JAMAICA PREFER TO STAY IN ENGLAND AND WORK BECAUSE OF MORE JOB OPPORTUNITIES.

(THIS IS BECAUSE JAMAICA IS A THIRD WORLD COUNTRY WITH LESS JOB OPPORTUNITIES).

WOMEN HAS A MORE EMOTIONAL SIDE TO THEM THAT CAUSES THEM TO HAVE STRONG BONDS BACK HOME. UNLIKE MEN WHO WOULD JUST SEND MONEY HOME; THEY ARE NOT THAT TIED TO THEIR COUNTRY. MORE WOMEN IN ENGLAND ATTENDS CHURCH MORE THAN MEN.

THIS IS ALSO THE CASE IN JAMAICA.

MEN TEND TO TALK MORE ABOUT JOB OPPORTUNITIES BECAUSE THEY ARE THE MAIN PROVIDER FOR THEIR FAMILY

women. I have argued, in my study of a Jamaican village, that the high rate of female church attendance is related to several factors: the informal taboos on women's participation in other activities which afford emotional release such as drinking at rum shops, and the cathartic nature of church services (Foner 1973a:76). These factors seem to operate in England as well. Many women belong to churches that offer highly emotional services and, as in Jamaica, women are informally excluded from the pub life in which men participate.

THIS FACTOR OF WOMEN ATTENDANCE AT CHURCH IS MORE THAN MEN IS BECAUSE OF THE ACTIVITY DONE ON THE OUTSIDE OF CHURCH.

Men, in contrast, are more likely than women to belong to trade unions, and male trade union members are more likely to attend meetings than their female counterparts (cf. Davison 1966:134)⁴ Differing participation in trade-union activities seems related to women's interrupted work histories, due to child-bearing and child-rearing, and to the fact that work is often a side-line to them (cf. Zweig 1952:128).

Conclusion

This paper has briefly analyzed some of the differences between male and female Jamaican migrants in England and has shown that these may be linked to overriding sex-role patterns: men are the principal providers in the family and women, even those who work, have major responsibilities for housework and child-care. Sex differences, of course, are not the only ones which shape the migrants' lives. Other variables—occupation, occupational mobility, income, and age, for instance—must also be considered to give a full picture of the migrants' experiences. However, it is when we sort out the impact of each of these factors that we can begin to understand the subtleties and complexities of the migration process and, by comparative analysis, work toward building general theoretical propositions about migration and sex-roles.

THE WRITER CAREFULLY ANALYSES THE BIG ISSUE BETWEEN JAMAICAN WOMEN AND MEN INTERMS OF MIGRATING TO ENGLAND. COMPARING WHO QUALIFY FOR JOBS. MEN ARE THE MAIN FAMILY PROVIDER & WOMEN TAKE CARE OF THE HOUSE AND KIDS EVEN IF THEY HAVE A JOB.

NOTES

¹ The data on Jamaicans in London are based on research carried out from February 1973 until September 1973. The primary research tool was a questionnaire administered to a quota sample of 110, chosen to control for age, sex, and occupational mobility. This paper is based on some initial quantitative analysis of these data and it is supplemented by the analysis of in-depth interviews with 20 persons from the original sample. The data on rural Jamaicans are based on fieldwork I carried out in a Jamaican village from July 1968 through September 1969 and they are fully reported elsewhere (Foner 1972; 1973a; 1973b). Both studies were financed by grants from the National Institute of Mental Health.

AUTHOR'S NOTES.

²About 318,000 West Indians—of whom about 190,000 were Jamaican—came to Britain between 1955 and 1967. The data in this paper refer to migrants from a lower class and, in a few cases, lower middle class background in Jamaica. The vast majority of the respondents came from rural Jamaica and, at the time of the study, most were in working-class occupations in London. The majority came to England between 1953 and 1962.

³For example, many more men than women said that prejudice was an important factor in their desire to return to Jamaica and that prejudice against Blacks worsened their status or made it difficult to assert that their status had improved in England. Men were also more likely than women to speak of difficulties arising from prejudice when contrasting employment opportunities in England and Jamaica and in discussing why they were not in their preferred occupations.

⁴It is true that a higher percentage of women than men work in places where there is no trade union. But when there is a union, women are less likely than men to belong to it.

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