

'FOREIGN-BORN' AND 'YOUNG' RETURNING  
NATIONALS TO BARBADOS:  
Results of a Pilot Study

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**Summary.-** This paper presents the findings of a pilot study of a relatively new group of Caribbean migrants, namely those second and third generation overseas-born Barbadians who have decided to migrate to the country of birth of at least one of their parents. After a brief review of the circumstances surrounding this relatively new and innovative migratory path, the insights gained from in-depth interviews with twenty-five such migrants are presented, focusing in particular, on their socio-economic and demographic characteristics, pattern of visits to the island leading to migration, the reasons for their move (why they left the UK/USA and why they decided to live in Barbados), the adjustments they have made and those which they feel that they still face. Through the analysis, issues of national and racial identity are shown to be critical.

## **Migration and Caribbean Development**

Perhaps more than any other region of the so-called Developing World, Caribbean social and economic change and development have been predicated on migration (see, for example, Marshall, 1982; Conway, 1994). Indeed, some social commentators are tempted to refer to the "uprootedness" of Caribbean peoples. This expression is helpful only in so far as it serves to stress the fact that migrations, both great and small, permanent and transitory, have been an integral component of Caribbean social and economic change throughout time. However, any suggestion that Caribbean migration can somehow be characterised as uncoordinated and essentially chaotic, has to be firmly rejected at the outset. This is because, the creation of the contemporary Caribbean region was premised on the largest enforced migration, that of black West African slaves by Europeans. On the abolition of the slave trade and emancipation in 1834, this inhumane movement, reckoned to have accounted for 6-10 million people, was followed by the migration of indentured labourers, in particular, those from India. Subsequently, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this movement was followed by the strong intra-regional migration of West Indians, most conspicuously in relation to the building of the Panama Canal between 1879 and 1914 (Richardson, 1985, 1992; Newton, 1984).

In the twentieth century, there has been an almost non-stop movement of Caribbean denizens to major metropolitan regions in North America and Europe, although due to various immigration acts, the former has become much more important than the latter. As the twenty-first century has opened, the mass movements to the 'North' in the immediate post war period have been complemented by the return migration of a proportion of those who made the journey from the Caribbean to London, Birmingham, Reading, New York, Boston and elsewhere. At first, it was envisaged that the original movement would for the most part be circular, with migrants to the UK eventually returning to the Caribbean. However, current evidence on this issue remains far from conclusive (see Anwar, 1979; Byron, 1994, chapter 4).

Thus, as Conway (1998) has observed, since the incorporation of the small island nations of the Caribbean into the external spheres of influence of European

mercantilism in the sixteenth century, the region has experienced successive waves of immigration, emigration and circulation. Hence, it is a well-exemplified observation that migrations of all descriptions have been a fundamental force in the creation and maintenance of Caribbean societies and political economies (Conway, 1998). As implied in the foregoing account, the range of migratory movements has been broad and varied, extending from enforced permanent movements to transient or shuttle migrations. They have consisted of short-term, circular and recurrent migrants, such has been their diversity.

This paper deals with a relatively new migration stream to the Caribbean region, which up to now remains entirely uncharted and unstudied. This is the movement of comparatively young returning nationals to the Caribbean drawn from the progeny of the twentieth century migrants who came to Europe, North America and elsewhere, in the wake of the Second World War. But before examining the characteristics of this new cohort of migrants, the better-known and studied phenomenon of retiree return migration to the Caribbean is briefly reviewed, in order to provide a context for understanding the return of young, second generation migrants.

### **Return Migration to the Caribbean**

The fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the voyage of the *Empire Windrush*, the vessel which carried some of the initial wave of West Indian migrants to Britain, occasioned much interest in that cohort of men and women who first migrated from the Caribbean to the United Kingdom in search of gainful employment and the chance to better their lives in the 1950s and 1960s. By far the most interest has focused on that sub-group of the displaced population that has either returned to the Caribbean on reaching retirement or during late middle-age. This situation has been true of the mass-media coverage of such Return Migrants, or "Returning Nationals", as they are now frequently known. In addition, a mounting, although by no means extensive volume of academic research since the late 1970s has also focused on older return migrants to the Caribbean (see, for example, Thomas-Hope, 1985, 1992; Gmelch, 1985a, 1985b, 1985c, 1987; Byron and Condon, 1996; Nutter, 1986; Byron, 2000).

With respect to much of the developing world and southern Europe, an extensive literature has developed documenting return migration to national homelands and its impacts on housing and agricultural landscapes (see King, 1986). The salient point is that whilst abroad, such nationals have remitted large amounts of capital back to their countries of origin. However, some writers have argued that these remittances do not always serve positive ends. Thus, it has been argued that these monies from overseas have generally served to fuel conspicuous consumption, especially of imported goods, elaborate and luxury housing, along with investment in what some have referred to as marginally productive enterprises, such as shops, bars and taxis (Gmelch, 1980; Gmelch, 1985c; Lowenthal and Clarke, 1982; Richardson 1975).

The argument has been advanced, therefore, that such capital has not always served to rejuvenate the rural economic sector. Indeed, in many circumstances, it has led to the ownership of land by those living overseas, and thereby, the creation of what are referred to as "idle lands" (see Potter and Welch, 1996; Brierley, 1985). This situation has prompted the suggestion that some small Caribbean countries have become "remittance-dependent" and that returnees cannot be regarded as significant agents of change (see Bovenkerk, 1981; Brana-Shute and Brana-Shute, 1982; Stinner *et al.*, 1983). However, in the Caribbean context, Gmelch (1980; 1987; 1992), De Souza (1998) and Conway (1993) have disputed this argument, and have written strongly in favour of the developmental efficacy of remittances from overseas. In this connection, it is salient to emphasise that when settled back into the country of their birth, such returnees continue to bring in substantial amounts of money in the form of pension payments and investment income. For example, in the case of Barbados, it was estimated by the Central Bank that in 1996 remittances from overseas and returned nationals amounted to \$US 62.5 millions. For the same year, the estimated revenue lost as the result of the duty free importation of the household effects of returnees was just in excess of \$Bds 9 millions (FURN, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ca 1997).

In fact, these arguments run parallel with those concerning the social impact of returning nationals themselves. Thus, local populations frequently regard returning nationals as interlopers who have "had it all too easy abroad". This view was

represented in an article which appeared in the UK newspaper, The Independent, (17 May 1998, page 13), under the title, "*Cold welcome for those who return to the sun*". The piece featured Corlet Ramsey, who had worked for thirty-five years in London before returning to his native Barbados. During his time in the UK, Corlet is described as having been variously employed as a plumbers' mate, a porter and a telecommunications operative. He returned to Barbados in 1992 in his late 50s. Corlet is cited as feeling that he is now treated as an 'outsider' in his country of birth, even as a 'traitor' for having 'deserted' Barbados in the first place. In the newspaper article, he summarises that "there's quite a lot of bad feeling about people who come back". Such feelings of resentment and suspicion have been well-documented by Gmelch (1980) in the case of returning nationals as a whole.

Such negative reactions to returnees have to be viewed in the light of a situation where Caribbean migrants faced a tough time in metropolitan societies, having to overcome poverty and racism in their efforts to earn a better living. As is well-documented, most West Indians formed a replacement population, that is they frequently undertook jobs that the bulk of the indigenous UK population was largely unprepared to tackle (Peach, 1967, 1968; Brooks, 1975). In addition, there is evidence that West Indians have fared as well in the United Kingdom, when compared with the ultimate career placements of essentially the same population that moved to North America.

One of the issues which is considered as contributing to resentment against returning nationals is that, as alluded to above, returnees are eligible to bring their household contents, including cars and consumer durables, into the country without having to pay import duties (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Barbados, 1996). Further, there is a view that returnees are relatively well-off, and this has led to accusations that they are routinely over-charged by traders and craftspeople. In Barbados, a number of local associations have emerged to help returning nationals. These include the British Overseas Resettlement Association (BORA), the Northern Group for Returning Nationals, the National Resettlement and Development Council, the Association of Barbadian Resettlers from Britain, and the Barbados Ex-Overseas and Friends Association. To some extent these organisations act as friendly societies, arranging Sunday socials for members. They also endeavour to confront the pressing issues

noted above by, for example, developing skills banks among members, so that they can avoid what they see as exploitation in the market place, and depend on returnee carpenters, plumbers and tradespeople. Once a month representatives from each of the groups meet as the "Umbrella Group".

Despite such problems, and notwithstanding the fact that elderly retirees are reaching the end of their working lives, Gmelch (1980, 1987, 1992) and Conway (1985, 1993) have taken up the argument that returning nationals and remittances should be viewed in a much more favourable light than hitherto. As such phenomena have long been an integral part of the social and economic fabric of the region, they argue that returnees have in the past, and are likely in the future, to play extremely significant roles in the region's development. This is in addition to the considerable amounts of foreign currency that is being brought into the country. For example, such groups should be able to contribute wider experience and skills, developed over a lifetime of work and domestic experience. Many of them are parents and grandparents able to add to the human and social capital of the nation in a wide variety of ways, enhancing the reciprocal linkages which serve to bind members of the society together. In addition, they have wide recreational and skills and experiences from which society can potentially benefit.

### **Young Returning Nationals to the Caribbean: An Uncharted Path**

As explained, all of these studies have primarily focused on returning nationals of retirement age. On research trips to the eastern Caribbean in the late 1990s the author met a growing number of "*Young Returning Migrants*" to the Caribbean, most of whom could be described as "*Foreign-Born Returning Nationals*" (see below for a precise definition). These are second and third generation West Indians, that is those born in the United Kingdom, United States, Canada or elsewhere of first generation West Indian immigrants, who for a variety of reasons, have decided to "return to" the countries that they themselves had not come from, but from which their parents have. However, this cohort of migrants has never been the focus of a specific study, and although aware of the existence of such migrants, neither the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Barbados, or the Barbadian High Commission in London have precise

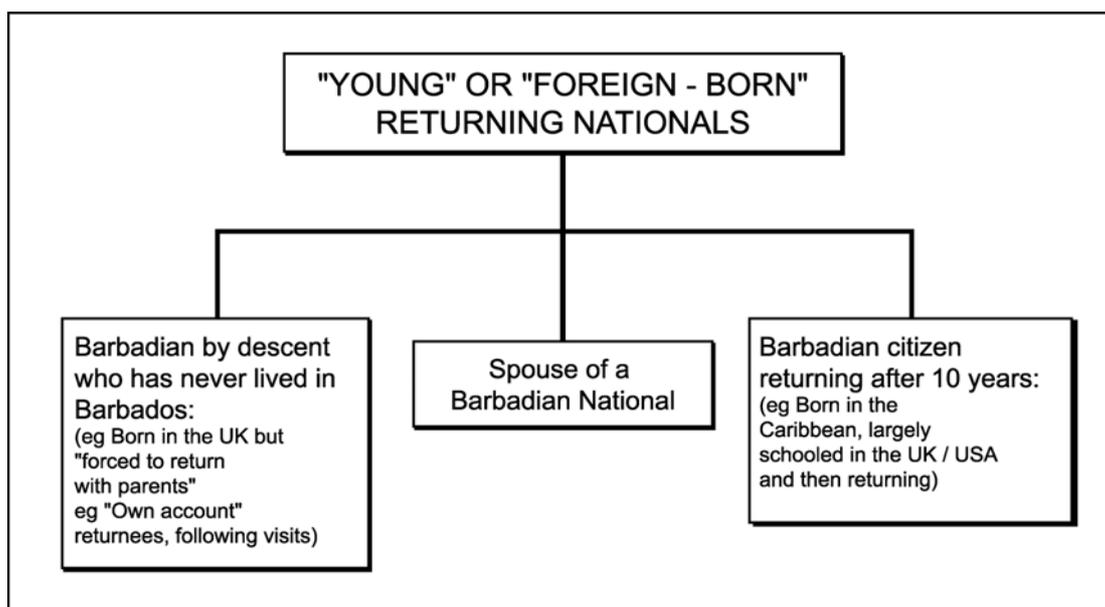
details as to the number of such migrants, their migration histories, their employment and wider socio-economic characteristics. As noted over twenty years ago, while nations collect precise statistics concerning 'aliens', the same seldom applies for returning citizens (Rhoades, 1979; Gmelch, 1980).

An exploratory research project, the first of its kind, was therefore carried out, from 1999 to 2000 by the author (Potter, 2000b). The aim was to provide a first analysis of the nature of this new movement, its duration and socio-economic impacts. In particular, by means of open-ended semi-structured interviews, the project sought to investigate the experiences and attitudes of such young returnees. As such, the project had important policy implications, including the possible contribution of young returnees to social and human capital and the skills base of small developing nations. The project sought to establish whether this new cohort of young returnees is regarded in a different light to the better-known category of older returnees. What motivates them, and why are they prepared to leave the country of their birth? Are they more skilled than their older counterparts? Do they effectively represent a "reverse brain drain" for the Caribbean region? How well-prepared are they and what stages have they gone through in order to effect the migration process? How are they received locally, and does their reception accord with their prior expectations? Are there personal or other characteristics that appear to predispose these young migrants to be more likely to succeed or fail? How do they adjust and are there discernible processes or stages of adjustment? Do they experience different processes of adjustment in the economic (workplace) and social spheres? How important are extended family support networks? Are there differences by age, gender and family-life cycle status, or by country of destination? What are the specific needs of such returnees and how best can they be assisted? There is clear evidence, for example, that young returnees do not wish to belong to the existing support groups for returnees. How many of them find adaptation too difficult and return to metropolitan societies?

## **The Research Design**

The principal target group for the study was what the present research refers to as Foreign-Born Returning Nationals, those who were born in the United Kingdom (or

the United States etc) and who have decided to make Barbados their home. They might also be referred to as ‘British Barbadians’, or ‘American Barbadians’ etc. All those who have a Barbadian parent can claim nationality by descent. Another group are those who were born in the Caribbean, but who later travelled to the United Kingdom (or elsewhere) with their parents. If after ten years or more they return to live in the Caribbean, they also qualify as returning nationals. In the present research, members of this group are described as Young Returning Nationals. They are frequently individuals who return when their parents reach the age of retirement. A third, but smaller group comprises those who are married to a Barbadian national. All three groups are summarised graphically in Figure 1. As already stated, the project was primarily interested in the first group, but as noted below, a few informants from the other two categories were interviewed.



**Figure 1 The definition of ‘foreign-born’ and ‘young’ returning nationals to Barbados**

The research was carried out from October 1999 to February 2000, with the assistance of a grant from the British Academy. Work focussed on both Barbados and St Lucia, but the present paper deals with the former. Formal discussions were held with senior civil servants at the Facilitation Unit for Returning Nationals (FURN), within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Barbados, and the Ministry gave the author formal research clearance. The FURN was established in February 1996,

with the mission of “contributing to the continuing development of Barbados through the combined efforts of returning and overseas nationals”.

As already noted, the overall aim of the proposed project was to provide the first comprehensive socio-economic and demographic examination of this cohort of foreign-born and young returning nationals. The project sought to understand their motives for migrating, and their experiences on migration. What do they see as the advantages of such a move, and what adjustments do they feel that they have to make? Do they feel that they have started to be assimilated within society, and what do they feel they can bring to the country of their choice? What percentage of such migrants re-return to the United Kingdom, United States or Canada, and after what period of time?

This was the first comprehensive study of young returnees to the Caribbean region. The process of migration has major policy ramifications both for the countries of origin and destination, socially, culturally and economically. The processes relating to young returning nationals may be regarded as important new elements of globalisation and transnationalism (Robotham, 1998; Portes, 1999; Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt, 1999; Vertovec, 1999).

Using background information provided by FURN, plus the returnee support groups, and snowballing contacts thereafter, twenty-five in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with foreign-born and young returning nationals. Virtually all the informants were contacted by telephone in the initial instance. Where it was the wish of the informant, they were interviewed over the telephone. Reflecting the issues that such returnees feel they face, a number preferred the relative anonymity provided by the telephone. However, where informants were happy to be interviewed face to face, this approach was adopted. The informants were asked why they had left their country of birth and why they had decided to settle in Barbados. They were asked about their patterns of visits to the island, as well as their migration histories. The main focus was placed on discussing the adjustments they felt they had to make and what problems they faced. Their employment histories, and basic socio-economic and demographic circumstances were also considered.

The fact that foreign-born and young returning nationals are considering moving to Barbados is a measure of the economic progress that the country has made over the last twenty years. Notwithstanding relatively wide spatial and social inequalities (Potter, 1986, 1993, 1996; Watson and Potter 2001; Potter et al 2003), Barbados is now an upper-middle income developing nation, with a GDP per capita of US \$ 11,200 in 2000. Barbados affords good employment prospects for in-migrants, especially via its well-developed tourism sector (Dann and Potter, 1997, 2001), but also in the public and private sectors more generally, especially in the service, light manufacturing and informatics sectors (Clayton and Potter 1996). Thus, as well as the long established rural sector dominated by sugar cane, Barbados offers extensive urban-based employment opportunities (Potter, 1996, 1999, 2000a).

### **The Socio-Economic and Demographic Characteristics of the British-Born Barbadians Interviewed**

As shown in Table 1, of those interviewed, the majority were females, amounting to 21 out of 25. Indeed, one of the four male informants specifically commented that he saw his move as temporary, and that most males of West Indian origin would seek work in major metropolitan cities such as New York, Toronto or London. This indicates that Barbados is a more appropriate migration destination for females. The majority of those interviewed were foreign-born, with 11 hailing from the UK, and one each from the USA, Hong Kong and Singapore (Table 1). Two informants had been born in other Caribbean territories (specifically St Vincent and Trinidad), but had been brought up in the UK/USA. There were nine 'young' returning nationals who had been born in Barbados, but who were brought up overseas. Most of these had left Barbados before starting primary education. The majority had parents who were Barbadian ("Bajan"), specifically numbering 42 out of 50 biological parents (Table 1).

The foreign-born and young returnees interviewed ranged from 23 to 45 years of age. The mean age at interview was 33.72 years, with a median of 35. Clearly, the returnees are second and third generation West Indians. Reflecting the average age in their early thirties, ten had children. Further, the sample was split almost equally between those who had partners and those that did not (Table 1). Of those with

**Table 1 Basic Socio-Economic and Demographic Characteristics of the Foreign-Born and Young Returning Nationals to Barbados**

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<b>(i) Sex:</b>			
Female	21	Male	4
<b>(ii) Place of Birth:</b>			
United Kingdom	11	USA	1
Barbados	9	Hong Kong	1
Other Caribbean	2	Singapore	1
<b>(iii) Parent's Place of Birth:</b>			
Barbados	42	United Kingdom	2
St Vincent	2	Jamaica	1
USA	2	Hong Kong	1
<b>(iv) Age of Young Returning Nationals:</b>			
Range 23-45 years			
Median	35 yrs	In their 20s	7
Mean	33.72 yrs	In their 30s	13
		In their 40s	5
<b>(v) Age at Returning to Barbados:</b>			
Range 15-39 years			
Median	30 yrs	In their teens	1
Mean	29.65 yrs	In their 20s	10
		In their 30s	12
		In their 40s	2
<b>(vi) Period Lived in Barbados since Return:</b>			
Range 0.4-16 years			
Median	3 yrs	Over 10 years	3
Mean	3.97 yrs	4-6 years	3
		2-3 yrs	7
		1-2 yrs	3
		0-1 yr	6
		Not stated	3
<b>(vii) Country of Domicile of Parents:</b>			
Barbados	23	Canada	2
United Kingdom	8	No data	8
United States	6	Dead	3
<b>(viii) Family Status of Young and Foreign-Born Returnees:</b>			
With partner	12	Partner from UK	7
Without partner	13	Partner from Barbados	4
No children	15	Not stated	1
1 child	8		
2 children	2		

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(Source: author's survey 1999-2000)

partners, seven said their partners had been born in the UK, and four were married to Bajans.

The median age at which the informants had returned to Barbados was 30 years, with a mean of 29.65 years. At the time of interview, they had lived in Barbados from 4 months to 16 years. The modal duration was three years, with a median of three years and a mean of 3.97 years. As noted below, several informants considered three years to be a critical period, during which young returning migrant had either come to acclimatize to living in Barbados or decided to ‘re-return’ to the UK or USA. The influence of first generation parents who had returned to Barbados attracting their offspring is implied by the fact that 23 out the total of 50 parents of the young returnees were living in Barbados at the time of the interview (Table 1). Eight of the parents were still living in the UK, six in the USA and two in Canada. The occupations of the returnees at the time the interviews were conducted are listed in Table 2.

**Table 2 The Occupations of the Foreign-Born and Young Returning Nationals to Barbados by Sex**

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<b>Females:</b>	<b>Males:</b>
Legal secretary	Car mechanic
Personnel Officer	Barman at a club
Solicitor	Waiter
Secretary	Fashion business
Psychiatric nurse	
Secretary	
Computer network administrator	
Guest House manager	
Secretary	
Accounts manager	
Qualified Chef	
Unemployed	
Airline ground staff	
Housewife	
Unemployed	
Airline marketing manager	
Pharmacist (currently unemployed)	
Restaurant manager	
Psychologist	
Graphic designer	
Not stated	

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The majority were in employment, with only three stating that they were unemployed and one female describing herself as a 'housewife'. A high proportion of jobs requiring skills, training and qualifications are featured among the female respondents. These ranged from a solicitor, a psychologist, a psychiatric nurse, an airline marketing manager, to a restaurant manager, a pharmacist (although currently unemployed), an accounts manager, and a qualified chef. Several of the informants in their 30s strongly emphasized the need to be well-qualified, preferably to degree level. They also spoke of younger returnees, those in their 20s and without qualifications, who had 're- returned' to the UK. On the other hand, bearing out the earlier comment, three of the four male informants were in manual occupations in the service sector (car mechanic, barman, waiter). The predominance of young female returnees to Barbados was clear, as was the professional nature of many of their occupations.

### **Reasons for Leaving the Country of Birth and for Migrating to Barbados**

When asked why they had decided to migrate, there were relatively few major reasons given by the informants, as shown by Table 3. Indeed, three informants specifically noted that they had encountered no real problems, commenting:

“There were no negative reasons why I left the UK”

“I had few problems with the UK as such”

“I had no real problems with England. I have good friends there”

Such comments suggest that most of the migrants left the UK more due to 'pull' factors, rather than 'push' factors. This is also borne out by the fact that several said that they had reached a natural juncture in their lives and just needed a change, had no commitments in the UK, or had come to the end of a bad relationship (Table 3).

Of those that did mention a push factor, the argument that the UK educational system is bad for black children, especially boys, was dominant, being cited by three informants. One commented directly that:

“Black boys don’t do well in the UK”

Another made the qualified statement that:

“Racism is not a big problem in the UK. But, in school, my son was referred to as the ‘little black boy’. Just before I left, a classmate called him ‘nigger’, and I had to spend a long time explaining to him why”.

One of the male informants had been to a British public school, and he specifically observed that:

“The UK educational system is bad for black people. Even in a private school they write you off”

**Table 3 Reasons stated as to why the Young Returning Nationals had decided to leave the UK/USA or Canada**

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Reason stated	Number of Citations
No real problem	3
UK educational system bad for black people	3
‘The UK race thing’/Barriers to black people	2
Wanted a change	2
Overlooked for promotion/’glass ceiling’ at work	2
Made redundant and given a lump sum	1
On the dole/no job	1
‘End of a long period of Conservative government’	1
Mundane way of life	1
Bad relationship	1
‘I am not a city girl’	1
No commitments in the UK	1
To get away from the cold	1
To get away from constantly changing fashions	1
To get away from crime in the USA	1

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Other push factors included what was described as “the UK race thing/barriers to black people”, being overlooked for promotion, and reaching a ‘glass ceiling’ at work. Following the Stephen Lawrence case in the UK, it was anticipated that issues

of institutional racism might feature prominently as reasons for migrating, but in the event, the informants rarely emphasized such issues.

Turning to the ‘pull’ factors, the main reason stated as to why the returnees had decided to live in Barbados was that family and parents were living there (cited by ten informants), followed by statements to the effect that “it’s home, it is where you belong” (two informants) (Table 4).

**Table 4 Reasons stated as to why the Young Returning Nationals had decided to live in Barbados**

Reason stated	Number of Citations
Family home/parents or partner there	10
Better opportunities (land, housing etc)	6
The weather/climate	4
Education of children/quality of schools	3
Ease of getting a job and keeping it	3
Wanted to start a business	3
‘It’s home/home is where you belong’	2
Slower pace of life/easy going place	2
Much safer/better security	2
Quality of life/attractive lifestyle	2
Availability of other part-time sources of income	1
Wages are lower but you can afford things	1
Infrastructure is good	1
Raised on romantic stories of the Caribbean	1
‘Surfing, especially at Bathsheba’	1
Loans easier here for black people	1
Country very entrepreneurial for black people	1
‘Men stand by their responsibilities to children’	1
Friendly people	1
More space/more like a rural area	1

The second most cited factor was the existence of better opportunities in terms of land, housing and living standards. Three others stated that they wanted to start their own businesses and that this is a more realisable goal in Barbados than in the UK or USA. Several informants stressed that although wages are much lower in Barbados, the potential is there for the future:

“I now have less than I had in the UK...but it’s a realistic goal”

“Wages are lower here, but I have a reasonable income and I can afford things”

Several interviewees maintained that those with skills find it relatively easy to find a job and to keep it. This was borne out by the fact that several informants explained that they had either migrated to try things out or were here on a temporary basis and had stayed because they had found a job before the time was due to return.

Climatic factors were cited by four of the informants as a reason for migrating, with one respondent arguing that:

“The climate is in your blood”

Barbados prides itself on its excellent educational system, with an official literacy rate of 97 per cent. Although commentators have questioned this figure (see Potter and Dann, 1987, for example), there is no doubt that there are some very good secondary schools in Barbados. Thus, not surprisingly, three informants emphasized that the education of their children/the quality of schools was an important factor in their decision to settle in Barbados. One informant specifically commented on the traditional basis of the Barbadian education system and the fact that:

“The three R’s are stressed here”

Other motivating factors included the relatively slow pace of life, an attractive life style, and the perception that Barbados is a relatively safe place to live. Another issue mentioned was the view that Barbados has recently become a very entrepreneurial society. It was also felt that in Barbados race is a far less important factor in terms of obtaining loans and finance. This was cogently summarized when one informant stated that:

“If you are black, seeing your bank manager is easier here!”

### **The Nature of Visits to Barbados Prior to Migration**

The informants were asked how frequently they had visited Barbados prior to their decision to migrate (Table 5). Naturally, most had visited several times. Indeed, several said that they had visited every year on holiday, while others appear to have been more purposefully testing the situation, making “many brief visits before the final decision”. One recurrent theme was that of visiting family, especially cousins:

“When I was fifteen I came here on my own and stayed with cousins who showed me around”

**Table 5 Pattern of Visits to Barbados Prior to Return Migration**

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On vacation every one to two years  
Visits are okay; the island seems like paradise  
I visited Barbados every year since 1975: seventeen trips in all  
Often visited Barbados when I was young, from the UK or Germany  
Made three or four visits here to family before deciding to settle  
Came here several times on holiday  
Regularly visited Barbados from the UK and USA  
Visited every two to three years over the seventeen years spent in the UK  
Visited two, three or four times per year before coming down  
Visited Barbados many time when young  
Had been coming here for years to visit family etcetera  
Made many brief visits before final decision  
Visited many times, coming and going  
Visited a few times with parents: visited alone at fifteen and stayed with cousins  
Made one visit to Barbados when I was twenty-six  
Lived in Barbados for two years, then back to Barbados for eight years. Then visited parents on and off before returning

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Several respondents commented along the lines that “visits are okay, the island seems like paradise”. Several mentioned the Bajan saying “visit me, live with me”, connoting the differences implicit between the two. A strong theme, to be discussed in the next section, is exactly how different it is to live in Barbados as opposed to visiting, however frequently.

A major practicality, stressed by several well-settled informants was the desirability of testing the situation by means of repeat visits before making a final decision. Most knew of someone who had sold up in the UK, a move they had subsequently lived to regret:

“I advise on a gradual approach to settling in Barbados. Otherwise it’s such a shock and people return to the UK”

“Don’t sell in the UK – rent out and come on a long-term holiday, and see how you get on”

### **Overall Reactions with regard to Adjustments to Living in Barbados**

The major issues informants reported they had to face and the adjustments they felt they had to make are summarized in Table 6.

Naturally, having already explained the reasons why they had decided to live in Barbados, overall reactions related to problems of adjustment. However, notably, a number of more positive reactions were cited. Three interviewees reported that they were generally satisfied, one mentioned the strong focus on education in Barbados, while another pinpointed the existence of genuine communities.

One issue, however, was mentioned by the majority of foreign-born and young returnees, specifically, difficulties in making new friends. This issue had a strong gender component. Thus, it was cited exclusively by female informants, and involved difficulties in making friends with Bajan women, but generally not Bajan men. Issues relating to accent and language, principally speaking with an English (as opposed to an American) accent, were the second most frequently cited. This factor was followed by the slow/relaxed pace of life (7 informants), feeling like an outsider (6), poor shopping/high prices (5), and aspects of a ‘culture shock’ (5). Although only mentioned by a few interviewees, the Americanisation of Bajan society, English people being regarded as ‘mad’, and perceived aspects of ‘racism within society’, were topics that were stressed forcefully by a small number of informants. Similarly, feelings of resentment, the ‘macho’ behaviour of bosses and having to accept things

**Table 6 The Adjustments Foreign-Born and Young Returning Migrants to Barbados felt that they had had to make**

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Adjustment	Frequency of citation
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(Source: author's survey, 1999-2000)

as they are without criticism, were also cited by more than two respondents.

Strong feelings were expressed by the informants in relation to many of these areas of adjustment. Indeed, in an early review of the literature on return migration, Gmelch (1980) noted that even retiree returnees who were originally raised in a country are ill prepared for return and suffer what he referred to as "reverse culture shock". How much more of a problem is this for those who have never lived in a country, but have only visited it? In the account that follows, the twelve most frequently mentioned issues (those gaining more than three citations in Table 4) are considered in turn. In

this account, the ‘narratives’ provided by the informants are drawn upon, in what is essentially a qualitative analysis.

## **Specific Issues of Adjustment**

### **Difficulties in Making Friends**

Making friends in Barbados was recurrently seen as very difficult, with a measure of relative alienation from mainstream Barbadian society being implied:

“In Barbados, friendship patterns are fixed”

“It’s the clique mentality of Barbadians. Nobody ever phones you up and asks you out”

Notably, an important causal role was ascribed to friendship patterns that have been established via patterns of secondary school attendance. Barbados has a common entrance examination at age eleven, and a very clear and strong pecking order of secondary schools exists, and it is apparent that these act as primary agents of socialisation. As one young returning national explained:

“In Barbados school friends and who you know are very important. It is tough if you do not know anyone”

The same sentiment was expressed from a different perspective by a returnee born in the USA who had moved to the island with her Bajan-born husband:

“My husband has a lot of friends from High School and they helped a lot when we came down here. They made for a smooth network”

The importance of other returning nationals and expatriates was stressed time and time again, and it was also implied that social relations are easier in the workplace than in the social realm:

“I would not see my work colleagues socially. There are only four people in Barbados I would phone. They are all English of Bajan parents and have lived here for less than four years”

“My friends are all from outside Barbados”

Naturally, having strong family ties, marriage and targeting friends were all considered as factors that make matters easier, but virtually none of the informants claimed to have female Bajan friends, regardless of how long they had lived in Barbados:

“I was very lonely at first. All my friends came from the UK. But I married here”

“I have not found friendship patterns too big a problem, but I have strong family support. Plus, my best friend is another UK-based returning national who left almost exactly the same time as me”.

A frequent observation was that Bajans go to work and then go straight home. Several young returnees said that they had suggested to their colleagues going for a drink after work on a Friday, but that this had been greeted by a measure of incredulity. Barbados is traditionally seen as a conservative and proud country, in which people keep their private lives and problems to themselves (Lowenthal, 1972). Lowenthal (1972) cites O.R. Marshall that ‘Jamaica has a difficulty for every solution, Trinidad a solution for every difficulty: Barbados has no difficulties!’ An associated contention among some of the respondents was that Barbadians are ‘snobbish’ about outsiders.

But the principal difficulty expressed by young returning nationals was in making female friends:

“It is difficult to make friends with Bajan women”

Several informants were unequivocal in attributing this to rivalry, both sexually (with respect to finding a male partner), as well as economically (in the job market):

“It is difficult to make female friends. Bajan women think you are going to take their men and their jobs”

“Friendship patterns were very difficult at first. Bajan girls are not very warm”

The informant who had lived the longest in Barbados, for over fifteen years, stated:

“I now have a few Bajan friends. Many think you are taking things away from them”

Some informants explained the problems experienced in making female friends in terms of gender vistas, plus issues of social standing:

“There is some bigotry. Womens’ vistas are more limited here: being secretaries, having children, being mothers. They are suspicious of outsiders. I expect they think we see ourselves as better than them. And in the workplace they are worried about their jobs.”

“My circle of friends is small. I have made more male friends than female friends. I feel I have very little in common with Bajan females”

This situation may perhaps be exacerbated by the frequently mentioned fact that a good number of prominent Barbadian male politicians are married to non-nationals, including women from Guyana and Jamaica.

On the other hand, friendships with males were seen as much easier both to make and to regulate. The view that being different drew attention from Bajan men was cited on several occasions:

“Women here are not friendly. But the men are friendly!”

“Making male friends is not a problem. But you have to be very clear what the score is. But this is accepted”

Interestingly, it has been suggested in the past that too little attention has been given to female migrants (Gmelch, 1980). In the present research, as well as in respect of friendship patterns, the particular situation faced by women migrants is also addressed below in respect of ‘macho bosses’.

## **Problems of Accent/Language**

For some of the informants, issues of accent represented a real problem:

“They take the mickey out of your accent”

“There is a good deal of teasing about my accent”

Saliently, this was frequently commented upon as a particular issue for those with British accents, as opposed to those from North America:

“It is harder for those with a British accent”

“People may try to overcharge you if you have an English accent, like my Mother when she visits the market”

“An English accent is a double-edged sword really. There is some resentment obviously, a feeling perhaps that you are trying to be grand. But in truth there is some jealousy. Most would love to live in the UK/USA if they had the chance”.

There appeared to be a general suggestion that in the social domain an English accent is seen as suggesting arrogance, whilst in the job market an overtly English accent could be a passport to job opportunities. Thus, having an English accent might bestow a significant advantage if working in tourism or the property market. It was universally held that it is easier for those with a North American accent:

“A UK accent is more difficult than one from the USA/Canada”

“Some people do tease me about my accent – it is better to have a US accent”

“Those from the USA and Canada are more accepted”

“I have no problem with my accent. I can slip from Bajan to American”

While some informants said that they made a joke out of being teased about their UK accent, others felt that the situation was more malicious and derogatory. These interviewees argued that nobody would think of openly mocking a white tourist about their accent, so why should they be different. It is tempting to conjecture as to

whether the relative antipathy to an English language in the social domain is part of a distinctly ‘post-colonial turn’, over thirty-five years after independence. On the other hand, an English accent can be an advantage in some areas of the job market. For example, a popular new female DJ on the radio has a marked English accent.

### **Slow Pace of Life**

Almost inevitably, the slower and more relaxed pace of life experienced in Barbados as opposed to that experienced in a metropolitan context was regarded as an issue demanding adjustment:

“At first, I found the place very slow”

“The slowness of Barbados has nearly driven me to distraction”

Clearly, however, some had adapted to this and now regarded it as a major advantage:

“The attitude to life is much more relaxed here”

“The need to slow down – but why rush like in the UK? I no longer get frustrated in queues”

“But now I have completely adjusted”

For some, this was a context which continued to influence day-to-day patterns of living, both in the work place and more widely:

“It’s the mindset here. Things are very slow”

“The accepting mentality of the people is a problem”

### **Feeling Like an Outsider**

Inevitably, some returnees reported that they were regarded as total outsiders. The following was a typical comment, replete with inferences of resistance:

“I encountered lots of hostility from people at work. I was regarded as an outsider. But I decided that their opinions were of no value to me”

For several, it was frustrating that they were constantly reminded of their national identity and the way in which it clashes with their racial identity:

“You may think that you are Bajan, but you are not really! I am referred to at work as the ‘English person’. I am still the outsider at work. I join in with the laughing and joking and I am accepted to a point. You cannot expect to be wholly accepted”

“You are constantly reminded that you are English and that you are not Bajan”

The experience of the appellation ‘English person’ was a very frequent one. This clear identification as being English clashed with the previous identities of the informants as West Indian when they were living in the UK. In an extreme case, one informant lamented that:

“The worst things that have been said to me here have been almost as cruel and negative as those I faced in the UK”

### **Poor Shopping/High Prices**

Poor shopping opportunities were specifically mentioned by several of the informants. One aspect of this clearly related to the expense of goods:

“When you shop in Barbados you pick out what you need, not what you want”

This also reflected the perceived difficulties involved in getting a good range of fresh fruit, vegetables and non-frozen meats in Barbados. The fact that many local clothing shops are old-fashioned was mentioned, along with the fact that there is little in the way of enforceable consumer legislation:

“Consumer protection is appalling. There is no real redress or refunds”

Like those Bajans who have the resources to do so, young and foreign-born returning nationals tended to shop whilst on trips to the UK, the USA, or elsewhere.

## **“Culture Shock”**

Several informants specifically invoked the idea of a ‘culture shock’ to explain their experience of living as foreign-born and young returning nationals in Barbados, stressing that it is “a different culture” in a wide variety of ways:

“The cultural differences are so wide...it’s a real culture shock”

“It is a culture shock, the differences, but you have got to work at it; don’t let people bother you”

Several respondents alluded to differences in the general work ethic between themselves as English-born migrants and indigenous members of the workforce. Typical comments were that they were used to seeing jobs through to completion without supervision and would report back on progress as a matter of established practice, neither of which it was claimed inevitably happen in the workplace in Barbados. The principal argument was that English- and American-born Barbadians do things faster at work than their indigenous counterparts. One informant bemoaned that because she did her work quickly, she was persistently allocated more work than her colleagues.

## **The Americanisation of Society**

An important part of the culture shock experienced by the young returning nationals appeared to relate to the perception that Barbadian society has become highly Americanised. For long referred to as “Little England”, as a consequence of its singular British colonial history, it seemed that the trend toward Americanisation came as something of a surprise to many of those who had been brought up by parents whose primary recollections of Barbados emanated from several decades ago. Typical comments included:

“But Barbados is becoming Americanised”

“Barbados is now so Americanised”

“Barbados is Americanized”

Some informants added the rider that this trend was particularly true of the younger generation, at the same time drawing specific attention to what they perceived as the existence of marked inter-generational contrasts:

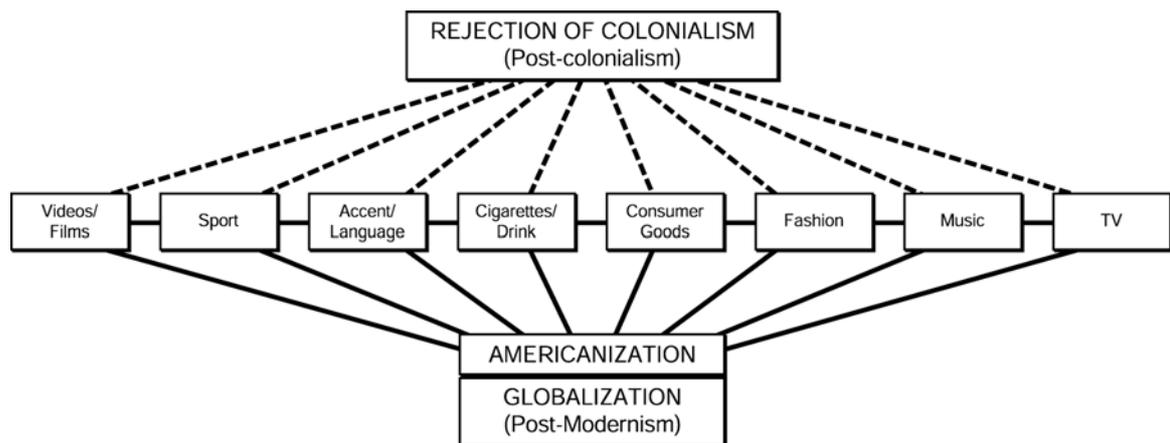
“Younger people are very pro-USA”

“Bajans adore Americans. The younger generation have adopted the American way of life. The older people find this uncomfortable”

One interviewee took matters further, implicitly arguing that the age-old sobriquet “Little England” is now wholly inappropriate, and thereby directly suggesting the operation of strong ‘post-colonial’ forces:

“This is Little America, desperate to free itself from its colonial past. Barbadians would change every name to an American one if they could! They really want to forget the past”

It is tempting to suggest that the rejection of English accents and the propensity to regard British returnees as ‘mad’ (explored in the next section), must both be seen as socio-cultural correlates of the exposure of the present generation of Bajans to strong forces of Americanisation. This simple working hypothesis is given graphical expression in Figure 2. On the one hand there is the rejection of colonialism and post-colonial forces; on the other, there are forces of Americanization and globalisation associated with the post-modern condition. It would indeed be surprising if young West Indians were not influenced by the globally hegemonic forces of music, fashions, videos, films, CDs, and sports emanating from the USA, linked to American accents, speech and modes of dress.



**Figure 2 Some tentative aspects of Americanisation and the rejection of colonization**

### **English People being regarded as ‘Mad’ and Issues of English Identity**

A further salient issue complicated the fact that a primarily English identity was being ascribed to the returnees. Several of the respondents reported that English returning nationals are openly referred to as being ‘mad’:

“They think that the English are mad”

“Bajans say that the English are mad”

“The attitude to returnees from England is far from positive. Returning nationals from England are regarded as mad. Old English attitudes are seen as arrogant”

The last comment raises an important issue that most foreign-born and young returnees seemed to find it hard to explain. Is this frequently cited view of English returnee madness also part of the post-colonial turn, that is a further way of discounting the perceived arrogance of the British-dominated past? Or does this derogatory labeling reflect the stress hypothesis of migration – namely, that migration is a testing experience and is associated with higher rates of stress-related mental illness? Notably, Mallett (*pers. comm.*) argues that a substantial number of Caribbean migrants to the UK who developed mental illnesses went back to the Caribbean, thereby giving credence to the association of mental ill-health with return in the eyes of Caribbean denizens themselves. Certainly in general conversations that

the author has had with Bajans, the saying “English people have snow (or rain) on their brains” has been used quite frequently.

Given such views regarding reactions to English accents, and the claim that English returnees are ‘mad’, plus the trend toward the Americanization of Bajan society, several informants seemed to be mounting strategies of resistance. Specifically, several argued forcefully that the path to successful adjustment was through the retention and fostering of an English identity:

“I like my English identity: a Bajan at heart and through heritage”

“I need to keep my English identity”

“I am English!”

For several informants, such was the force of this counter identity that they stressed the irony that while they had generally felt Bajan or West Indian in the UK, now that they live in the Caribbean, they feel more English than they had ever done previously in their lives.

### **Issues of Race and Class**

Further fundamental issues relating to racial and national identity were addressed by several of the returnees. Before addressing these issues, several important facts must be borne in mind concerning race in Barbados. First, as already noted, Barbados was from first European settlement a British colony, and unlike many other islands did not come under the control of any other European colonial power. Further, it had a low level of miscegenation during the colonial period. Although Barbados has a higher proportion of whites than most other Caribbean societies, standing at some 4 per cent, many have commented on the operation through time of an effective colour bar, with the longstanding existence of black and white cricket clubs and other organisations. Thus, influential white Barbadian families run all the renowned “Big Six” companies that control much of the Barbadian economy. Finally, in common with the rest of the post-colonial Caribbean, the strong and continued operation of a colour-class system

is openly acknowledged, where skin shade is strongly linked to occupation and inferred social standing.

It seemed clear that the operation of these facets of racial distinction in Barbados had come as something of a shock to several of the young returnees. For example, one interviewee commented that:

“The unity of black people in the UK is lost when you come here. For example, at lunchtime at work, there is a white-black split. It is just accepted. Barbados is the most racist society I have ever lived in”

The argument that the unity of black people experienced in the UK regardless of country of origin is dissipated in Barbados was encountered several times. Similarly, another respondent reacted strongly to the operation of the colour-class system:

“Racism is horrendous in Barbados. Not black and white, but among themselves, by shades of colour. I am very saddened by this. I can’t understand it”

Whilst it is possible to enter into long debates as to whether the recognition of colour gradations represents a form of labeling or *de facto* racism, it is clear that the existence and operation of the colour-class system, and the economic hegemony of the white minority of Barbadians came as a real surprise to several of the foreign-born and young returning nationals:

“Racism here is a major issue. I was not really aware of this before I came here permanently”

“...a lack of respect for each other. I have developed a see and not see attitude”

Reflecting matters of class and race, several of the informants stressed that they considered Barbados as a very class-based society, and that this served to explain some of their wider socio-cultural experiences:

“It is a very class-based society. If you are seen as a gap-tenantry [low-income housing area] person, then you will be treated as such”

Another informant clearly sought to link this to the generally centre-right political tendency of contemporary Barbadian society, in a manner that apparently linked this to the problems experienced in making Bajan friends:

“This is a money-society. People are very materialistic and concerned with external appearances. Generally, people do not invite you into their homes. People want a good car and a big house that looks good from the outside”

### **Feelings of Resentment**

Several informants said that they felt the same type of negative reactions as those experienced by their older counterparts, the retiree returning nationals. These generalized feelings of resentment did not appear to be related to the fact the returnees can bring household items and vehicles into the country without paying duties (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1996). The general sentiment appeared to be expressed by one respondent when she observed how:

“Some people feel that you have had it easy in the UK, with the dole and housing. You have to try hard. People are not going to make it easy for you. They have even said this to me”

### **Macho Bosses**

Another issue that was expressed in gender-specific terms was what informants described as the “macho-style behaviour” of male bosses in Barbados. For example, female employees observed that:

“Bosses here think they can get away with murder. They treat staff bad, they curse and carry on at them. They couldn’t work like this anywhere else”

“Macho-bosses exist here, and complaints procedures rarely exist. Managers just turn a blind eye”

“My first job was male dominated and the men felt that they could say whatever they liked to me”

Several foreign-born returning nationals asserted that some bosses act in inappropriate ways in the workplace and that indigenous female employees do not feel that they can complain in any way about this. One of the returnees said that she

had specifically told her boss that she would report him, and that as a result, he had stopped on her third and final warning. Another female informant related how her male boss had told her how as a young woman she should wear particular items of personal clothing. But on the other hand, the same interviewee said that she felt safer in general in Barbados. She reported that it was when she was in the UK that she felt more worried about the risks of sexual assault.

### **Having to accept things as they are**

Almost inevitably, the foreign-born and young returning migrants noted that they were expected to change to Bajan ways of doing things, rather than trying to change the way things are done locally. Typical was the comment that:

“You have to accept things as they are. You mustn’t try to change things”

In the workplace, several informants made it clear that allusions as to how things are done in the UK or North America are a no-go area, and that more subtle strategies involving demonstration effects have to be employed:

“Don’t say this is how things are done in the UK!”

One informant cogently summarised the pragmatic reality of the situation:

“You can’t expect people to adjust to you. You have to adjust to the new situation”

However, a further respondent complained that non-Bajan born migrants were expected to adjust to, and assimilate, Bajan ways almost instantaneously:

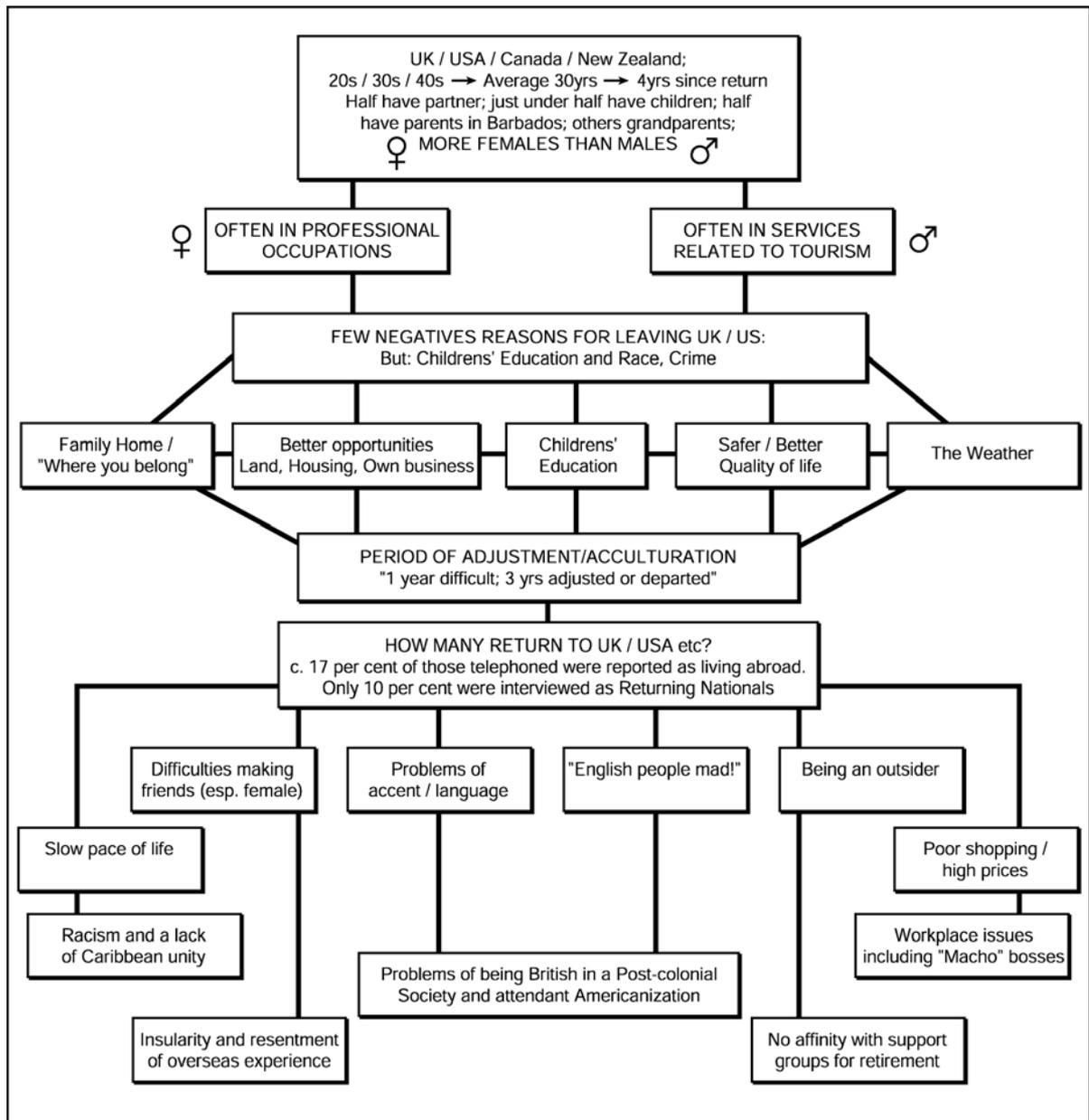
“On the other hand, you are expected to change immediately to the Bajan way of doing things”

The early literature on older returning nationals tended to ask whether returnees could be seen as repositories of new ways of doing things within relatively conservative societies (Gmelch, 1980). It would appear that even for these young returnees, the degree to which they can contribute to the development of more flexible and adaptable societies is limited, at least in the short-term.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

A graphical summary of the findings of the research concerning foreign-born and young returning nationals is provided in Figure 3. The study has shown that the majority of foreign-born and young returning nationals to Barbados are females. Many of them have specific skills and training and occupy professional jobs. They are relatively young, with an average age in their early 30s, and they are relatively gifted, in this sense effectively representing a ‘reverse brain drain’ that is bringing talented people ‘back’ to the Caribbean (Figure 3). In this sense, in time, the young returnees have the potential to contribute to the evolving skills bank of a country that prides itself on being one of the worlds most developed ‘Third World’ countries.

As such, if the adjustments that they feel that they have to make are not too great for them, young returnees might well prove to be potent forces toward transnationalism in the post-colonial evolution of Bajan society. The Barbadian state and the Barbadian Prime Minister Owen Arthur have strongly invoked the concept of ‘social capital’ in the successful post-war development of Barbados (McAslan, 2000). The injection of fresh talent and experience from overseas in the form of young returning nationals would seem to be a real resource in such a context. It is also salient that as the older generation of returning nationals come to the end of their lives, this group of young migrants will represent one of the strongest potential links between the UK and the Caribbean, a fact of which the High Commissions seem to be increasingly aware.



**Figure 3 A graphical summary of the main findings concerning foreign-born and young returning nationals to Barbados**

Another finding is that surprisingly few of the returnees cited strong ‘push’ factors as promoting their migration, other than the inference that young black males were labeled and tended to do relatively poorly in school. Issues of institutionalized racism were not generally seen as causal. Rather, racism was seen as something that could occur anywhere, anytime, and which had to be faced. The positive pull factors of migration were much more effective; these included Barbados being the family home

(“where you belong”), better potential opportunities in the fields of business, land and housing, better education for children, the weather and a better overall quality of life (see the summary provided by Figure 3).

Against this, however, it was evident from the analysis that the young returnees face a number of major adjustments (Figure 3). Key here was the feeling of being an outsider, and this seemed to be pronounced for those with English accents and identities. Whilst reactions to the issue must depend substantially on factors such as personality and family situation, some of the informants clearly found this very difficult to accept, and basically, derogatory. That English returnees as a whole are seen as ‘mad’, combined with strong perceptions of the Americanisation of society, meant that issues of national and racial identity loomed large for the foreign-born and young returnees. In particular, any problems associated with their identity as West Indian and black in the UK, seemed to have been replaced with equally pressing issues concerning their Englishness in the Caribbean. At least three of the respondents seemed to be adopting a strategy of emphasising their Englishness as a counter-identity to the majority. Perhaps as a linked issue, several of the respondents stressed that issues of race and racism had taken them completely by surprise in the Caribbean, and how they bemoaned the loss of the unity of black people they had felt in the UK. The single biggest problem, discussed time and time again, was the near impossibility of females making female friends in Barbados. This was directly attributed to both economic and sexual competition.

Despite the many areas of adjustment that they felt they faced, none of the informants stated that they were actively considering re-returning to the UK or USA at the time of the interviews. Several reported that they had retained property in the country of their birth and strongly advised other returnees to do the same. It is difficult not to conclude that the fact that their parents had returned to Barbados was crucial in promoting the ‘return’ of many in this younger cohort. Notably, 14 of the 25 returnees had at least one parent living in Barbados. An important, although as yet unexplored aspect of this cohort of returning migrants is the number that re-return to the land of their birth. Of some 136 young returnees the author tried to contact during this research, 73 per cent were not contactable (no longer at the address, line no longer attainable, number out of service, repeated no answer etc), and 17 per cent

were described as living abroad by relatives (see Figure 3). Several informants stated that the first year after return is extremely difficult, and that they had been ready to re-return on many occasions. Others noted that they knew returnees who had re-returned. This needs further investigation in areas of origin in the UK and USA. Some interviewees argued that three years was a critical juncture, after which crucial adjustments had been made, or migrants had re-returned. Other informants made reference to a critical period that they effectively described as a 'seven year itch'. Nobody knows just how many "shuttle migrants" (Gmelch, 1980) there are moving back and forth and not feeling settled in either country.

These and other issues raised by the first project are the focus of continued research that is currently investigating the attitudes and social dynamics of foreign-born and young returning nationals to the eastern Caribbean. The project is funded by the Leverhulme Trust, and will extend over a two and a half year period, having commenced in January 2002 (see Potter and Phillips, 2002). In particular, it is anticipated that the present paper, plus the programme of continuing research will help in correcting what Gmelch (1980) bemoaned as the almost totally descriptive basis of research and writing on return migration.

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