

## Chapter 10

### BECOMING PAPA

#### KINSHIP, SENESCENCE AND THE AMBIVALENT INWARD JOURNEYS OF AGEING MEN IN THE ANTILLES

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*Adom Philogene Heron*

'Life for me was a journey!' Scratchie declares, the matter-of-fact tone of his words failing to betray his distant, contemplative expression. We sit. I am perched on the concrete step leading down from the rusty galvanized gate that opens onto the road above his yard. He is opposite, on an overturned plastic bucket in the doorway of the small plywood house he shares with his wife and daughters. He exhales deeply. The smoke of his evening spliff wafts away above us, caught by the breeze of the river that runs towards the Caribbean Sea beneath the *falaise* on which the yard sits. I begin to scribble, trying to keep up with his words. 'I believe that no one can change the hands of time', he continues,

The setting of time. Jah set his time. And he knows the road he set you on. Maybe, I ... maybe the road I choose made me a better person today because the life I was living – I never thought today I would married, I would be a family man and today I am, you understand'. That's why I told you my life is a story. I've been incarcerated more than eighteen times. Every country I pass – I've been to thirteen different countries without a passport. My life is a story!

It is December 2012, just the third month of my first fieldwork journey to Dominica, the verdant and mountainous homeland of my maternal grandparents. The commonwealth of Dominica is a francophone *Kwéyol* (Creole) and English-speaking island of approximately 70,000 people that sits between *Gwada* and *Matnik* (Guadeloupe and Martinique) in the Lesser Antilles. It is my first encounter with ‘Scratchie D’, a stout, stocky and charismatic black man aged thirty-seven from the village of Loubiere south of the capital, Roseau, on Dominica’s west coast.

Upon telling the young men in the village of my research project on men and family life, I was enthusiastically persuaded to record the story of ‘Scratchie Dan’ –or ‘Old School’ as his youthful *padnas* (‘partners’, peers) call him – a father of two, who attends church, is married and ‘have live plenty life already’, so I was told. They encouraged me to document his locally infamous life as a young man ‘in the world’ and ‘on the block’. The former, a biblically-derived idiom connoting ‘irresponsibility’ and itinerancy, materialist pursuit and carnal desire; the latter, the village setting for such a life, the notorious roadside stage on which ‘yout man’ (like themselves) ‘pull up’/*posé* (momentarily dwell), vying for respect in an ongoing play of solidarity and competition, while surveying the street scene for transitory moneymaking opportunities. Scratchie excelled in this realm. Here he made his name. The tales his young peers share of his narcotics dealing, theft, incarceration and escape between *Gwada* and Dominica, all attest – via their public telling – to Scratchie’s achieved respect in this outside world of men. However, his peers also informed me of his more recent moral and spiritual reorientation, his inward movement into house, home and marriage, his ongoing project of refashioning himself into the respectable figure of ‘family man’.

In December 2007 Scratchie was freed from prison ‘for the last time’, he vowed. In the five years between this release and our meeting, his life shifted radically. He began working at a nearby quarry, entered a cohabiting common-law union with his first ever girlfriend, Angeline, and became *beau pé* (step-father) to her eldest daughter, who would come to call him ‘daddy’: ‘is me she really know as a fada from de time I came in deir life’. And with this newfound responsibility Scratchie transitioned from self-provision and occasionally ‘extending a hand’ to his mother, to the paternal imperative to provide – learning ‘*what it really is* to be a fada!’

Yet the contours of his transition were far from smooth. To Angeline’s frustration Scratchie was often drawn back to the block. In

2008 she became pregnant and gave birth to their first child. Tragically the infant died in mysterious circumstances at daycare (from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, it is believed). 'He was only t'ree months old.' A sombre tone interrupts his usually robust manner. 'I decided that was a sign. That was a wake-up call God was giving me ... I told her [Angeline] you know something, we're gonna get married. We gonna start to, you know, live a different life.'

In early 2009 Scratchie proposed and Angeline accepted. They converted to Pentecostalism, married and in December their daughter, Ange, was born. Shortly after realizing his paternity this second time, an intriguing though not uncommon thing happened: his own father acknowledged him as his son. In all his thirty-six years he had not known the identity of his father. A father was never 'named' by Scratchie's mother during his childhood between *Dominica* and *Gwada*. But upon coming to know one another they rapidly developed a close relationship. Scratchie now visits his father daily; coincidentally he lives just up the hill from them.

As our interview continues, Scratchie becomes more philosophical. He takes a sip from his Guinness stout, turns to me and declares,

Life! Life is journey we have fe bear. Life is a mountain we all have to climb. We all have our span to live in life, but that is why I ask Jah for a long life. I want to see my children grow. I want to see them graduate. I want to see them pull my beard, my grandchildren pull my beard [he gestures]. That's how I wan' live now, man!

Two months after this first meeting, Angeline, who was heavily pregnant at the time, gave birth to their second daughter. Eight months later Scratchie tells me his (step-)daughter – now aged nineteen – is pregnant and expecting a child. He excitedly informs me he is soon to become a grandfather, thus marking the actualization of his aspiration. From October 2013 to April 2014 I moved into a small wooden house in their family yard and continued documenting their day-to-day lives through 'observant participation', a sensitive subversion of the self-other-reifying ethnographic orthodoxy (Lassiter 2005). During this time I saw Scratchie and his wife work hard for little pay to maintain their family. I heard his self-convincing reminders that the block was 'not like before' and he preferred to pull up at home. I observed him walking his two youngest daughters to and from preschool (see Figure 10.1), attentively assisting the middle one (of five years) with her homework, and 'looking at' (minding) them in the evenings when his wife and eldest daughter were at work, visiting friends or at church. I listened as his wife

lamented his 'blocking their blessings from God' (material prosperity) by not quitting smoking (weed) or attending church as regularly as he should. And I witnessed his joy as his grandson entered their home.



FIGURE 10.1. Scratchie with his two youngest daughters walking to pre-school and daycare

## Introduction

I have offered this sketching of Scratchie's metamorphic biography because it presents a vivid example of a Dominican man's entry into fatherhood, 'family life' and grandfatherhood. Scratchie captivantly narrated his story to me across countless conversations and informal life-history interviews during my eighteen months of fieldwork. He regularly told me that he is 'on a mission now', conscious of his life journey as an everyday epic, an exceptional tale of redemption of which others – notably young men – can make an example. Yet although his complicated journey is idiosyncratically unique and the contrast between past and present is drastic, its general course and the motifs are no doubt familiar to many ageing men on the island. Scratchie's shift from being 'outside', on 'the block' and 'in the world' with his peers, to his newfound responsibility, increased presence at home and closeness to kin (wife, father, children) reflects a widespread pattern of centripetal later-life movement among Caribbean men (Barrow 2010: 31). Put simply, slowing down, 'catching yourself' (or 'taking stock') and becoming a 'family man' – from mid-life onwards – is a common feature of ageing for a diverse cross-section of Caribbean men (of varied class, occupation and colour).

The central aim of this chapter is to understand how Caribbean men's kinship lives change as they move towards and into later life – a life phase beginning in a man's late thirties. To do so I present a series of ethnographic snapshots of Dominican men aged thirty-seven to seventy-four decelerating into a slower daily rhythm, contracted socio-spatial routine and kin-oriented life. Yet complicating any notion of a linear journey, 'inside' are the men's fond tales of reputation-making adventures (spear fishing, sexual conquest, crime stories) and memories of life in the outside world of their *padnas*. I take such reminiscences to disclose a dissonant insideness and enduring existential affinity to an outside world once inhabited by their virile younger selves. However, being a grandfather and ambivalently 'inside' is just one of the generational moments under focus. I also engage the question of intergenerationality in biographical terms, developing a picture of the process of *becoming* papa. Hence individual life trajectories are traced, palimpsest-like, through three overlapping generational layers – being fathered, becoming fathers and becoming grandfathers – to understand how men's kinship lives change with time.

Methodologically, the narrated personal histories of eleven grandfathers reflecting back on kin-lives through the subjective present comprise the main body of ethnographic material directing my claims. However, in places I also draw on the reflections of adult children (now parents themselves) to contrast the men's fathering and grandfathering. Furthermore, I employ 'observant participation' in their daily lives to gain a practical picture of the grandfathers' spatial movement and intimate interactions with grandchildren. Qualitative depth and a sincere representation of lived experience, rather than statistical representativeness, are my intentions here. There is the temptation in Caribbean sociology to try and statistically reveal whether Caribbean fathers are predominantly 'absent' or 'present' *vis-à-vis* households and family life (Roberts and Sinclair 1978: 58). However, my modest (though no less important) aim is to present rich case studies of individual lives that claim representative fidelity only to themselves. Nevertheless, though speaking for themselves (in their contextual specificity), the men's biographies are far from anomalous, and, indeed, 'speak to' regional patterns.

Individual transitional lives constitute my focus here, replacing traditional approaches to generation as a 'before-after' juxtaposition of analytically separated generational cohorts. This biographic approach has the benefit of revealing the simultaneity of generation. Much like Stephanie Lawler's shifting and doubly constituted mother-daughter subjects (2000: 3), the elder narrators in this chapter variably present themselves as sons, fathers and grandfathers, interchangeably shifting generational location as they look back on particularly meaningful aspects of kinship pasts. This concept of generation enables an understanding of how men's relations to kin (specifically fathers, children and grandchildren) as well as symbolically gendered spaces ('inside', 'outside', home, yard, street (Barrow 2010: 128)) are transformed throughout Dominican males' social ontogeny. At the same time as revealing details of the changing lives, spaces and practices of men and their kin, this framing also sheds light on changing wider kinship ideas, processes and events in Dominica through historical time. Significantly, the post-war migration of many fathers to England in the 1950s and 1960s, the emergence from the late 1970s (with the arrival of American T.V., returning migrants and public education) of an explicit 'responsible fatherhood' concept, characterizing 'care' through provision, discipline and protection (previously fathering ideals were more implicit and optative) and the repeating experience of familial emigration in response to economic crises and

natural disasters (e.g., Hurricane David) – all patterned the men's familial lives in particular ways.

Before continuing it is necessary to note that the unruly circumstantial course of each individual biography inevitably disobeys the sequential neatness that the three generational moments (above) might imply. In the world (as distinguishable from sociological imagination) categories like 'father' and 'grandfather' overspill the ordering lines we conveniently draw between them. This is especially true of the Antilles, where the open-ended and flexible nature of social categories has been widely acknowledged (e.g., Mintz 1996; Rodman 1971; Wardle 2007). Consequently it is important to keep in mind that these generational phases, separated in response to their narrated salience, are far from bounded. They are often experientially continuous, overlapping and defying simple chronology (e.g., Scratchie having children before becoming his father's son).

The experiences and practices of elder men in families is an untheorized and underdocumented area of Caribbean ethnography (with a few notable exceptions: Barrow 2010: 114, 118; Brodber 2003; Ford-Smith 1989: 98; Henriques 1953: 113, 197; Rubenstein 1987: 244). Hence before elaborating the generational journeys below, it is imperative to briefly turn to the matrifocality thesis to interrogate this conspicuous dearth.

### **Matrifocality and Invisible Men**

Caribbean kinship's theoretical history may best be summed up as a struggle for analytic acuity. Since the 1950s successive Caribbeanist cohorts – each varying the theoretical guise – have sought order from the chaotic familial dynamics of this 'undisciplined' region (Trouillot 1992), a region D'Amico Samuels once astutely termed 'the battleground for competing theses regarding family structure' in anthropology (1988: 785). Yet for all the contestation and propensity of its social forms to evade gatekeeping theories, the 'matrifocal family' thesis has followed Caribbean kinship through its ethnographic career. Proposed by R.T. Smith in 1956, the theory posits that 'women in their role as mothers ... come to be the focus of [family] relationships' (Smith 1996: 42). He clarifies that 'matrifocality is a property of the internal relations of male as well as female-headed households', but identifies the maternal figure as a 'focus of affective ties' and 'an economic and decision-making coalition with her children'. Although 'men contribute to the [material] support of the household

... [they] do not participate very much in childcare or spend much time at home' (1996: 41–42). These fundamental conclusions on the centrality of mothers and the marginality of male conjugal partners/fathers to family life have functioned over the years to provide a sense of clarity, a taken-for-granted stable core from which Caribbeanists can elaborate their analyses. However, given the emergent character of the Caribbean social landscape, where forms and values pragmatically flex and flux according to everyday uncertainties (personal, geological, financial and meteorological), I am inclined to approach matrifocality's apparent stability with suspicion. This begs the question, then, is matrifocality 'well documented historical fact' (Brown et al. 1997: 87) or simplistic default theoretical posture?

Taking popular Dominican kinship ideas at face value would seem to prove me wrong. In fact, Dominicans normatively delineate a clean division of parental labour that appears entirely 'matrifocal'. I am told that mothers sacrificially 'make' children – endure the burden of 'carrying dem nine month and pushing dem out', dutifully meeting their daily needs, and, in turn, receive filial loyalty and care into old age. Men on the other hand, 'only put them there' (procreativity 'plant the seed'), and principally (if forthcoming) express 'care' by materially 'maintaining' their child(ren), whether an everyday presence in a child's life or not. Yet although it is clear that Dominicans are reflexively aware of – even celebrate – mothers' vital roles and organizational functions within familial settings, labelling Dominican families as 'matrifocal' obscures more than it reveals. Allowing kinship ideology alone to guide our ethnographic focus is to miss the power of observation and specific case studies in complicating facile conclusions about the way people live their lives. The age-old ethnographic conversation between what people observably do and what they say they do is crucial here to moving our understanding beyond matrifocality's constrictive margins.

In its fifty-five-plus years matrifocality has received a good deal of critical attention (Blackwood 2005; Trotz 2004). This is as much for theorists' misuse of the concept (Trouillot 1992) as it is for the gendered assumptions on which it tacitly rests and the non-normative familial realities its optics preclude. Matrifocality implicitly assumes a patriarchal ideal of male (nuclear) family headship. The very identification of familial configurations as 'matrifocal' marks (and reinforces) their negation of this implicit norm. Note how nobody ever talks of 'patrifocal' families; they are simply unmarked and normative (Strathern 2005). And since the negation is the 'missing' patriarchal man (Blackwood 2005) – authoritative provider, disciplinarian and



guide – the *cooperative* kinship practices and roles of men in households and kin networks (Stack 1974) are cut off from ethnographic view. Therefore not only do fathers gain little recognition for their caring and affective (non-normative) practice (Brown et al. 1997; Fox 1999) – either in Caribbean societies or Caribbeanist accounts of them – but grandfathers, uncles and brothers are also peripheralized into obscurity. These consanguineal male kin are the real ‘missing men’. Centring our focus on mothers, within households and domestic roles, reinforces ‘the notion of the domestic as an essentially unchanging feminine and bounded domain’ (Trotz 2004: 371). And as much as it locks women ‘inside’, matrifocality leaves men conceptually ‘outside’, rendering the father ‘a somewhat shadowy figure who drifts in and out of the lives [and households] of ... family members’ (Liebow 2003: 3), while leaving other men (grandfathers and so on) effectively invisible. Therefore although it is important to recognize interlocutors’ gendered differentiation between ‘inside’ (private, respectable, feminine, household, kinship, marriage) and ‘outside’ (public, reputation-oriented, masculine, street, peers, outside affairs) (Wilson 1973), my aim is to demonstrate the reorientive movement of men between these symbolic spaces with age, thus demonstrating the porousness and changing dynamics of domestic space and kin relations over time.

## As Sons

### *Paternal Absences, Reunions and Blood's Utterance*

Growing up not knowing one's father – having a father who was personally and physically remote or ‘absent’ – was a common experience for the grandfathers I came to know. A number of them held feelings of abandonment and anger towards the men who had left their mothers, their village or the island during their infancy, migrating like many of that generation to England in the 1950s or 1960s and never ‘sending for them’. For some, fathers were men who refused to acknowledge them or were never ‘given’ paternity for them by their mothers; mothers who took on the sole burden of their upbringing, ‘mother and child left to the elements’ as one grandfather described it. Others felt indifference towards men whom they simply did not know, for whom they had only a vacant figurative outline, an unfulfilled idea of what a father should be. Yet this image was at odds with the reality of a man they had never met or had only vague childhood memories of passing on the road

or visiting their mothers. Nevertheless, with the passage of time – having successfully survived into adulthood (without him), realized their generativity by becoming fathers themselves, and reflected on the ontological imbalance of not knowing the man responsible for ‘putting them there’ – some of the men sought to (re)activate relations with their fathers. These (re)unions were moving tales of inclusion into paternal lineages founded on the powerful principle – and vocality – of shared ‘blood’, as well as an embracing ideal of familial togetherness.

In Dominica they say that ‘blood speaks’. This popular aphorism signifies that blood – the biogenetic shared substance of family – has a mystical means of revealing relatedness between hitherto unknown kin. And since paternity is based on a premise, its ‘proof’ must be identified in shared ‘ways’, speech patterns or physical continuities – complexion, gait, body techniques, somatotype and other bodily nuances (e.g., finger nails, bowed legs, etc.) – between father (or paternal kin) and child. In cases of disputed paternity the putative father’s aunt or mother may visit the baby some months after birth to determine whether the child is ‘theirs’ (Chevannes 2006). Upon positive identification of a child as kin they well determine *sa sé zanfannou* (‘that is our child’). Thus blood agentively ‘speaks’ through the reading of bodies by family, and in some cases community members, who vocalize a visible likeness. Yet it ‘speaks’ non-verbally, too, mystically provoking serendipitous encounters between long-lost kin or leading one’s spirit to ‘take’ (develop an uncanny affinity for) someone else’s, who is later revealed as family. Unlike the anticlimactic reunion tales of adult children and biological parents documented by Carsten (2000), I contend that the mutual amity expressed by father and son, their emphasis on blood’s vocality and their folding of disjunct kinship time through ‘as if’ narratives (i.e., remarking that it is ‘as if’/like they were raised by their fathers), produce an affective continuity of being between father and son.

#### *Mr Scotland’s Story*

‘I was raised without a father ... he totally abandon us!’ says Mr Scotland, a tall, fifty-nine-year-old police officer, father of six and grandfather of two (at least he mentions only two), as he reflects back on his relationship with a father who left for England when he was four. Bearing only the parting memory of being driven around Portsmouth (Dominica’s northern town) on his father’s motorbike, days before his departure, it would be forty-six years before Mr Scotland saw him again. During his early adult life he felt forsaken

by this man: 'I had more rage in me, that if I meet him I prob'ly have strangle him', he asserts. However, after meeting and being embraced by his paternal family (aunts, grandmother, cousins) while a junior officer stationed in their outlying natal village, followed by their subsequent disappearance during the havoc of Hurricane David in 1979, and his reunion with a paternal aunt in 2003 whilst she was visiting from the United States (where they had emigrated to after the hurricane), he had a realization:

I grow up, I reach fort-nine, and I say you know something, it's damn nonsense ... my father cannot be alive and I do not know the man that is responsible for bringing me. He is a sperm donor, that is how I look at it. But ... I'm getting older and wiser. I'm more cool ... I'm not in any more rage ... I need to know my father!

As such, his aunt (a key organizer in the family) suggested he visit her in the U.S. and then his father in the U.K. So in 2004, after gathering some savings, he flew to St Croix (U.S. Virgin Islands) to see a paternal brother, America to see several aunts, and finally, London, to meet and spend 'four glorious weeks' with his father. He and his father's first (re)encounter in Heathrow airport was powerfully affecting. After landing and an unsuccessful attempt to use U.S. dollars to buy a machine-issued bus ticket to the maternal uncle with whom he planned to stay before he contacted his father, Mr Scotland walked wearily back into the terminal towards the nearest information point:

So I'm going back now to de information desk. I'm hearing my name, 'Al Scotland report to de information desk' ... I'm seeing a fella standing, facing away from me, and something jus tell me, 'Quick, this is him!' First time I was seeing him as an adult. At the same time I see him and I'm walking towards him ... something tell him, 'Hey!' Because he's looking at 'arrivals', but I had come from there already ... So he looking dis way ... and I'm coming from dis side [*gestures*]. *He jus' turn!* When he see me ... he had a newspaper under his arm, he jus' drop it. He jus' grab me and he began to cry ... I held him away from me and I tell him, 'look padna I didn't come here for dat', and I hug him again. He tell me am I hungry. I say, 'no I'm not hungry'. I tell him I'm contented, *that the man that have the responsibility for bringing me here, I meet him!*

Mr Scotland never explicitly articulated what told him 'quick, this is him!', nor exactly what seized his father's attention and urged him to suddenly turn. Neither did he hazard to explain what could have

caused the serendipitous sequence of the whole episode. Yet given Dominican ideas about the numinous power of blood to ‘speak’ and render relatedness apparent, it is fair to surmise that the unifying idea of shared blood may be the ‘something’ that drew them together. This unifying principle was rendered visible through physical continuities which, once emphasized, bridged the disjunctures of paternal abandonment: ‘I doh know why, for some reason immediately we clicked. Because ... when he reached home he call his sister, he tell his sister when he went to the airport *he jus’ saw himself walking towards him*. Because he find I looks very much like him’.

Therefore, as another grandfather put it with reference to a similar case of physical likenesses initiating kinship, ‘that is where de blood really start to flow’. Particularly, in the context of the existential emplacement implied by meeting a long-lost father, emphasis on physical likeness as a gloss for common blood provides the foundation of their shared kinship. This foregrounding of likeness/blood enabled kin-lives spent apart to be folded back, covering (though not disregarding) absence, and exposing as ultimately significant the progenic basis of paternal relatedness – the ground from which to develop close bonds into the future. Mr Scotland and his father now speak almost daily on the phone. He adds that a paternal brother in England ‘cannot understand dat kind of relationship me and my fada have and we didn’t know each other ... he raise with him and he doesn’t have that kind of relationship’. Mr Scotland’s brother’s comments echo Scratchie’s reflections on his own father. They share an ‘as if’ concept of their kin-lives that imaginatively recasts the past – *as if* spent together – to help produce a shared present and future. As Scratchie comments, ‘you know the relationship between me and my father *is like I grow with him* ... me and him very very close. Trust me’. Hence the bridging of lives lived apart enables a closeness, a fond continuity of being that, in fact, ironically may not have been the case – as we see with Mr Scotland’s brother, and will see in the following section – if his father was ‘on island’ or ‘present’.

### As Fathers

I always maintain that every generation after me have to come stronger!

(Young man talking with friends in Roseau)

The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father.

(Ezekiel 18:20)

The idea of intergenerational progress – giving one’s children opportunities in life that one did not have growing up – is a widespread ethic that motivates parental duty and sacrifice throughout Dominica. This idea produced in many of my interlocutors an individual moral drive to ‘play their part’ when they became fathers, providing for their children (school books, fees, shoes, snacks, clothes, etc.) as their fathers before them had failed to do. Mr Scotland asserts, ‘I was raised without a father. But I decided I did not want my children to raise without a fada ... it was an abandon-ment! You cannot abandon your children so! That is why I am so happy that I never abandoned *any* of my children’.

Steadfast in their refusal to visit the sins of their fathers upon their children, most of the men were deeply committed to ‘being there’ as fathers in the material sense. Many of the men resisted the urge to unsustainably have ‘children all about’, as was valorized among some of their father’s generation, signifying virility and contributing to a man’s reputation as a sexually prolific ‘hot boy’. Inevitably, the men’s conjugal circumstance (relations to ‘child-mothers’), number of children and the vagaries of Dominica’s peripheralized economy – where wages are low and jobs few and far between – conditioned their abilities to ‘care’ for their children. Yet for the most part they were able to ‘do what they had to do’, surpassing the material shortcomings of some of their fathers before them.

However, with age, experience and reflection, combined with an awareness of changing ideas about ‘responsible fatherhood’ that have emerged since they initially became fathers in the 1970s and 1980s (fatherhood as a personally significant life condition, as opposed to *fathering* as simply siring), some of the men reflected that they ‘could have taken more of an interest’ in their children. Commitments to ‘liming’ (the convivial pursuit of ‘pulling up’, drinking and talking by the roadside with peers), working and generally spending time ‘outside’ (the home), away from their procreative family, in addition to assuming a distant disciplinarian posture when in the conjugal home, rendered many of the fathers what is locally termed an ‘absent-present father’. This paradoxical idiom connotes a father who is physically present and conjugally cohabiting, even married and sleeping at home, yet emotionally and personally remote.

#### *Mr Cuffy and Mr Pierre*

Mr Cuffy, a charismatic police inspector, father of two and grandfather of four, who never knew his father, reflects back on his life as

a married man more oriented towards the outside world than his conjugal family:

I cannot attribute that to work ... there's a time you leave work, so you have to be with the family. So you're out liming, you know ... you're drinking you know. *You're in the world* ... you [only] come [home] to sleep. The same thing I'm telling you, you put a liddle money in the home or you give the wife a liddle money and you think that's it. That does not mek you a father. That does not mek you a father!

Mr Cuffy appeared to wend his way through his early fathering, doing the basics and not questioning the wheres, whys, nor hows of his paternal imperatives. But with age, men like Mr Cuffy become more critically reflexive. Many silently 'take stock' of the abdications of their younger years, seeking amends in later life. As one adult daughter told me, with her decreasingly distant elder father in mind, 'So I think when we get older, so much reflection is done. 'Cause that's all you get to do, you're retired and so a lot of reflection is done, a lot of introspection. I guess people see the error of their ways along life, and decide to make a change on it'.

Similarly to Mr Cuffy, Mr Pierre (now retired) was a senior ranking police officer (interestingly, as he told me once, police officers are 'some of the worst offenders' when it comes to having 'chil'ren all about' and not 'maintaining' them). Unlike Mr Cuffy, however, Mr Pierre was never much of a limer. Instead, 'I was too much in love with my job, I gave too much time to my job', he soberly states as he recalls the shortcomings of his relationship to his now deceased first wife and three children 'by her'. He elaborates, 'I don't think necessarily that I was negligent, but I, I failed to spend the time that I should have. So to some degree I feel that I cheated my children, you know, of my presence in their lives, of the attention that I should have given them'.

Mr Pierre is now sixty-eight, he has remarried and has a ten-year-old son with his wife. Like many of the serial fathers I spoke to who had children with multiple women across the span of their adult lives, the experience they gained from their earlier fathering, along with their changing life circumstances and changing societal ideas, led them to approach their elder fathering differently. Elaborating this notion of a changing fatherly self Michael Diamond writes that 'the ageing father must ... more fully embrace previously rejected gendered dimensions of himself by giving way to the expressive, connective and disclosing modes of his being' (1998: 289).

Mr Pierre is currently a full-time father, staying at home while his wife works at an office in town. He cooks his son's meals, prays with him morning and night, picks him up from school, assists with his homework and takes him for transinsular drives at the weekends. Mr Pierre's first son from his previous marriage drowned during his teens. Reflecting on his past and present fatherly selves he solemnly compares his relationship to his two sons:

It became clearer and clearer to me that the relationship that I have built with my young son is far better and far deeper than what I had with my first son, who died tragically. I just thank God, every day that he had given me an opportunity to do better. I am thankful that at this time in my life I'm retired from the police service but I'm full-time in fathering, and I thank God for that opportunity. For me it's like a second chance.

Mr Pierre's redemptive later-life fatherhood is more overtly demonstrative than his earlier fathering, and that of his father before him. 'I don't recall one day my parents telling me that they love me ... I just knew. It didn't trouble me to think about', he states during our second life-history interview, highlighting the self-evident love behind their parental labour. The same could be said of his earlier fathering also. However, at the end of the interview as we get into his car to drop me home he calls his son to inform him that he will be back late. Before hanging up he casually signs off the call with the gentle reminder – 'love you' – his two simple words evincing the contrast between his father's, his own earlier fathering and his contemporary fatherhood practice.

## As Grandfathers

### *Becoming Papa*

*Papa* is a term of respect, a status that evokes a quiet, gentle, even playful patriarchal presence in a home or family setting. While in the neighbouring 'French islands' *papa* means father, in Dominica it is the deferential address of a grandchild to a grandfather (*pé* being Creole for one's immediate father). Yet in the context of kin networks that span Dominica and its francophone neighbours, this play between *papa* as father and grandfather is more than mere translational nuance. Rather, it evinces the overlapping generationality mentioned above, and as I will demonstrate, a *papa's* proximity to grandchildren.

When I first visited my grandfather's rural northwestern village of Colihaut at the start of my fieldwork, just six months after his passing, I recognized a common classificatory slippage in grandfather-grandchild referents. My grandfather's friends and extended kin referred to me as *zanfan pou Mendes* ('child for Mendes') or 'Mendes' son'. Despite frequent reminders that Mendes was actually my grandfather, I would continue to overhear comments such as, 'he looking jus' like his fada, *wii'*, as I passed elders on the road. I came to realize that although a child will call their grandfather *papa* or 'grandpa', he will often refer to them as 'my child'. Similarly, to third parties (e.g., elder villagers) grandchildren are also 'his children'.

Querying this, I asked Mr Scotland why he makes no nominal distinction between his immediate children and grandchildren. He explained, 'there's no distinction ... because what they saying is *his product*. Because without him your fada wouldn't be there for you to be there'. Hence any descending child in a man's lineage – whether direct progeny, 'grand-', or 'great-grand-' – becomes 'his child'. A man's name ideally 'lives on' through his children, both literally through a patrilineally inherited 'family name', and figuratively through his patrimony, descendants' memories of him and local tales told of his public persona by friends and family (as were told to me about my grandfather). This idea of living on through kin, or 'vicarious ego expansion' as Blake termed it amongst Jamaican fathers (1961: 192), resonates in Dominica whereby 'putting children on de earth' offers men a semblance of individual immortality. Since 'they came from your being', as Scratchie once framed it, children ensure a senescent man, cognizant of his encroaching 'day of reckoning', an enduring presence in the lived world (or, like Mr Pierre, a chance at redemption). Partly for this reason elder Dominican men express a sincere fondness toward their grandchildren, which the dyadic term 'my child' embodies. This notwithstanding, Mr Scotland adds a historical explanation, highlighting that post-war parental emigration to England in the 1950s and 1960s resulted in many children of his generation growing up in Dominica with their grandparents. As such, a mutual closeness developed, resulting in grandparents calling grandchildren 'their children'. According to Mr Gregg, a Rasta, artist and grandfather from Newtown (a community between Roseau and Loubiere), grandparents have a 'special love for de gran-child' and see them as being 'for dem'. The child *is a gift*. It is an *Ex-ten-sion*, it's a family extension, everybody does feel nice', he adds letting out a warm chuckle at the joy that interaction



with grandchildren, lineal continuity and an expansion of kinship being brings to him and other grandparents.

Yet while a grandfather's immediate progeny and grandchildren are indeed both 'his children', he will often act differently towards them during their respective childhoods, becoming more lenient towards the grandchild. Mr Gregg comments that children,

Have greeaat liberty wiv de grandparent! Yeah, dan de direc' offspring 'ave ... They're a kind of a softer-, sometimes your moda and fada will be more hard wiv you, more stric', and de grandparents will go down to allow you to get, ya kna, to get free. Yeah, de grandchildren can do a lot of liddle mess up fings an' it's taken for granted, 'oh, let de chil'ren play' ... Not that one wants their grandchildren to go astray, but is a *soft*[-ening], you know. Because maybe more age and more knowledge and so on.

Interestingly, while Caribbean fathers are normatively represented as the final arbitrators of familial discipline – evidenced in the motherly threat, 'wait til your daddy come home!' (Lazarus-Black 1995) – as grandfathers this role is often inverted. Grandmothers become the more punitive grandparent (Henriques 1953: 197), while grandfathers – growing more placid and freed from direct paternal imperatives – can become figures of fun, play and affection, particularly towards young grandchildren. Such a transgenerational shift in parental practices is vividly revealing of both the gendered distinctiveness of these roles and their repositioning through senescence.

Indeed, Anne, an adult daughter in her forties remembers her father as a staunch authoritarian, yet observes a gentler, warmer and more permissive grandfather:

Things that my father never did with me he does with my children, and I am amazed. The first time I remember my father kissing me on my cheek I was fifteen. And I can't remember any other emotional physical contact with him other than that. But my kids are all over him. They're on his bed, they're jumping on him – we wouldn't dare do this as children! I mean it's just unimaginable.

Similarly, Don, a Rastaman in his thirties who lives in Loubiere with his common-law wife and their eight-year-old daughter, observes that Val, his widower father, is less strict and more playful towards his granddaughter than he was with Don as a father:

To me, plenty of fings you as de child could never escape wiv, she escaping wiv it ... They have that ability from that time [i.e., the

present time], they can almost do what dey want and dey getting away wid it scotch free. Whereas you now, dem times dere [i.e., before], had no time! *GET AWAY WITH WHAT?! STEUPPPSSS* [kisses teeth]. *YOU'D GET BLOWS IN YOUR ASS AND YOU'D GET BLOWS IN YOUR ASS!* ... I believe it's a game to him now. It's an amusement park!

With the primary responsibility of 'correction' falling to the immediate parents, grandchildren can become a source of entertainment and companionship to grandfathers in their daily playful interactions. Mr Scotland says that interactions such as carrying his two grandsons under each arm during their weekend visits 'make me feel younger'. Emphasizing the personal importance of their fulfilled exchanges, he adds that were it not for his grandchildren 'I would probly say, "you know, [it] is time for me to leave, is time for me to go" [pass away]. But now, as if they bring more zeal to my life. My grandchildren are what I'm living for'.

Furthermore, for many elder men who follow a stoic 'work-home' daily routine – between their workplace, 'garden' (smallholding), and the yard/veranda/house – affectionate interaction with grandchildren in the household offers a tenderness that contrasts with the more boisterous sociality of men in 'outside' public spaces and workplaces. Advancing a respectable moral concept of self-worth – preferring not to linger on the road or 'interfere' (mingle) with a present generation of 'young fellas' who are 'always in *pwoblem*' (fighting, drinking or smoking (ganja)) – senescent men spend less time outside with peers and more time at home, and consequentially, with kin.

Yet given the Antillean male impulse towards being 'outside' and free to rove from the symbolically feminine domain of the home, elder men become 'ambivalently inside', paradoxically feeling only partially 'at home' in the home. Hence the interstitial spaces of the yard and the veranda, at once 'outside' yet not public, become spaces of elder male dwelling. The former is a productive space of male 'yard work', the latter a gender-neutral space for watching the passing world and yarning with visitors. Furthermore, such yarns often imaginatively transport elder men through time and space as they tell tall tales of overseas sojourns, local feats (e.g., on the sea or the football savannah), criminal adventures and sexual escapades during their younger, more virile manhood. All this, in the act of recital, attests to their experience of the world and their secured reputations therein.

*Gus's Ambivalent Homeliness*

The threshold between inner and outer was a site for intense struggle and friction, for men could not live with work alone, yet nor could they remain for long in the private world of the family without feeling a sense of identity loss and invalidation.

(Rutherford 1992: 17–18)

Gus is the husband of a maternal aunt of mine. He is a quiet security guard aged sixty, father of one, *beau pé* of three and grandfather of six. He is especially close to his youngest granddaughter (aged three) who lives in their bayside home along with his adult daughters, granddaughters and wife. He works long hours and spends most of his waking time at work, home, or in *his* yard (it is 'mum's house' and 'papa's yard') tending his animals (rabbits, chickens, dogs), cutting coconuts, picking fruit or doing odd jobs. On Fridays when he comes home from working late he will nonchalantly tell the family 'goodnight' as he meets them watching T.V. in the living room while his wife works (e.g., cleaning fish or making juice) in the kitchen. He then lovingly lifts and cuddles his youngest granddaughter, typically nestling a kiss in her neck before she wriggles free and goes about her business. Gus is an almost silent figure in the home, offering only short, functional conversation (about food, clothes to be washed, working hours) with his adult daughters and wife. Yet he becomes more vocal in exchanges with his granddaughter, playfully encouraging her to tell him about her day or unconvincingly threatening her 'not to do that' and 'go there' or she will get a spanking (that rarely ever comes) as she mischievously runs away from him, chuckling. On Sundays when he is off work and not in the yard he usually sits to watch cricket or westerns on a comforter on the floor with his two youngest granddaughters, before invariably drifting off to sleep as the children play or doze beside him (see Figure 10.2). Though never expressed in conversation, it is observable that Gus enjoys the company and warmth that his grandchildren bring him.

One afternoon sitting with Gus on his veranda, I ask how his life has changed since becoming a grandfather. He says he does not go out as much as he used to: spear fishing with his elder brother and friends, bodybuilding with another group, or just 'pulling up' and chatting with a fellow security guard at a nearby gas station during the man's Friday night shift. Now he spends most of his time at home or in his yard. After pausing for a moment of thought he interjects, breaking his silence, 'I begin to realize, it's not good to be too homey



FIGURE 10.2. Gus's routine Sunday nap beside his granddaughters

you know. When you homey, the day you go out everybody have to try and find out, "Why you out late? Where you going? What you doing?". He is referring to his wife and daughters – used to his routine presence at home – whose concerned questions, he feels, nag at his autonomy. Furthermore he adds that the children 'can be so noisy', often making his ears hurt. Hence he retreats each afternoon to the serenity of his animals and his shaded bayside yard. Our

conversation then drifts back to spear fishing. He lights up, losing his usual phlegmatic manner as he enters an exhilarating story of a diving adventure off Dominica's southwestern tip. He describes jumping on his friend's motorbike, spear gun in hand, flippers and snorkel in his pack, and off they go. He mentions encounters with sharks, his ability to hold his breath longer than his peers and the big catches they would proudly return with, carrying a laden *kwaye* (fish wire) bearing an array of fish and seafood for all to marvel at as they drive back at high speed along the coastal road. 'Back then we never bought fish from the market', he proudly states, echoing the nostalgic remarks I would often hear auntie make about his productive fishing days. Wistfully he proclaims, though more to himself than me, 'I want to go back to it', his retrospective tale reminding him of the satisfaction of his roving former self. However, although observably bringing about a feeling of loss, the very act of sharing his story of adventure, danger and bringing back a bounty of fish for his wife and children testifies to his past competence, technical skill and a qualified sense of masculine being in the outside world of his peers. Gus's imaginative retrospective journey into his personal history served to bring his sense of achievement in that world into the present. As his audience – a young and itinerant male who is 'of outside' in a very general (though not unambiguous) sense – I sat captivated, intently absorbing the vivid oral re-enactment of his tale. Gus's telling and my hearing not only reinforced his reputation, but asserted it as a resource to mitigate the feelings of displacement produced by his ambivalently inside, senescent life.

## Conclusion

In the series of individual biographic sketches presented in this chapter I have sought to retrieve the kinship lives of elder men from the shadowy margins of Caribbean ethnography. Locating sons, fathers and grandfathers at various points of disjuncture, distance or intimacy throughout paternal life histories, I have synthesized a general, though complicated, picture of ageing inward motion. Such deceleratory motion has social, spatial, temporal and affective implications as senescent men dwell with greater frequency in the home, the yard and the veranda, and move into closer relations with kin. Absences and successful later-life reunions with emigrant and unnamed fathers, fatherly determination to disrupt cycles of absence yet unintentionally becoming 'absent-present' in

the process, pursuing paternal redemption with age, developing a special love, leniency and playful relations with grandchildren yet expressing ambivalence towards one's increasing homeliness – all patterned the fathering trajectories documented here. The composite gendered tale I have sketched is one of existential orientation and reference: initially, towards peers, work, liming, the block and the outside world, and eventually, towards children, grandchildren, kinship and the dissonant insideness of home life mediated by memories of a virile past.

Gaining an intergenerational view of these male kinship biographies has demanded an understanding of how past and future are experienced and made sense of in familial terms. What has emerged from observation and narrative across the three generational moments is that a strong ontological connection to progenic kin (children and grandchildren) develops as a man grows through fatherhood and grandfatherhood. I have framed this increasingly significant sense of connection as a 'continuity of being' between kin. For the individual men I came to know, who identified their antecedent paternal pasts (e.g., 'knowing the man who put you there') and descendent progenic futures (e.g., grandchildren being 'extensions') as existentially significant to their lived present, this idiom expresses the increasing personal importance of direct lineage and kinship with age. Thus, far from possessing the stable status of being absent or invisible appendages to matrifocal arrangements, men move in complex ways along senescent paths towards an ideal of intergenerational alignment that tenders familial togetherness.

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**Adom Philogene Heron** is a PhD candidate in social anthropology at the University of St Andrews. His work focuses on masculinities, kinship and fatherhood in Dominica, West Indies. Adom also edits a blog called *Fathermen* ([www.fathermen.blogspot.co.uk](http://www.fathermen.blogspot.co.uk)), an open anthropological platform that explores fatherhood and family life throughout the Afro-Americas. His chapter in this volume was winner of the 2014 Emrys Peters Essay Prize.