



# A feminist review of the idea of Africa in Caribbean family studies

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## Introduction

The cultures and peoples of Africa have had a profound influence within the Caribbean diaspora. This influence ranges from the peopling of the Caribbean to cultural practices encompassing religion, art, language, music, theatre and dance. The ubiquitous influence of Africa on Caribbean culture makes for an intriguing discussion of how African cultural influence is reflected in the Caribbean family literature. Do family studies models consider ethnic cultural influence, in particular traditional African culture, as an important contributory factor in the processes of Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices? More specifically, to what extent does the literature include the influence of traditional African gender practices in the analysis of women's roles in Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices?

This article is a review of the family literature that has emerged from the Anglophone Caribbean. This literature provides information helpful to a greater understanding of gender roles, gender practices, and gender relations in the Caribbean region. Caribbean families are characterised by legal marriages as well as many other forms of conjugal relationships that fall outside the legal definition of marriage.<sup>1</sup> Many children are born to couples who are not legally married, and there is generally an extended family system in which women play a central role in the social, cultural and economic aspects of family life. These family forms persist across periods of social and economic change and across social classes. Theoretical perspectives try to account for the emergence and persistence of these various forms and practices, the relationship between family structure and function, how family practices are related to acculturation, and how social meanings of family differ according to group experience and gender identity. A major challenge to all these various perspectives is trying to explain women's central role in the Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices that are different from some supposed European "norm".<sup>2</sup>

The objective of the review is to critically assess the influence of African culture as it appears in models of Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices. The literature is examined across theoretical approaches and time periods to discern patterns in the family models discussed.<sup>3</sup> Analysis of the literature shows three distinct patterns concerning the ways in which African cultural traditions are treated as factors shaping family and kinship practices. These patterns are related to research approaches to the Afro-Caribbean family as defined by area of focus and the type of factors that are considered. The patterns that emerge include models of the family that negate the effect of traditional African culture, those that are indifferent to the effect of traditional African culture, and those that consider traditional African cultural influences to be central to the processes of the Afro-Caribbean family. The infusion of feminist perspectives into mainstream family studies challenges some of the assumptions of models that negate or are indifferent to the influence of traditional African culture. They do this by incorporating social relations of power as part of their analyses of family and kinship practices.

### **The negation of African influence**

Researchers identified as negating African cultural influence explicitly reject the idea that traditional African beliefs and practices play a role in Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices. Structural factors such as the system of slavery and economic hardship are seen as the influences responsible for producing family and kinship practices that differ from European family norms. These family models uncritically assume that European family norms are the ideal standard for comparison of other family and kinship practices. Such acceptance of European family norms as the ideal naturally leads to negative perceptions of Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices.

The negation of African cultural influence is clearly observed in some models, while in others, it is more subtle. The negation of the role that African cultural influence plays in family and kinship practices is found in research arguing that the institution of slavery and the plantation system totally destroyed African culture, thus preventing the transfer, survival or retention of African family patterns. The formation of non-nuclear Afro-Caribbean family structures and kinship practices are purported to be the direct result of economic and cultural adaptations to the conditions of slavery (Frazier, 1966; Goveia, 1965; Matthews, 1953; Patterson, 1967; Simey, 1946). According to this position, the conditions of slavery were so brutal that most slaves were unable to maintain or practice

their traditional African culture, including their family and kinship practices. Some researchers believe that slaves were forced into patterns of “casual” or temporary relationships because the conditions of plantation life did not allow for stable conjugal unions (Goveia, 1965; Mathews, 1953). It is suggested that these “casual” relationships constituted a culture of promiscuity that has been carried over into contemporary society (Mathews, 1953).

The negation of African cultural influences in family models is more subtly reflected in the work of researchers focused on understanding family and kinship practices in more contemporary situations. African cultural influence, while not explicitly negated in the family models, is not seen as useful to incorporate in analyses of the contemporary Afro-Caribbean family (Blake, 1961; Clarke, 1957; Rodman, 1971; Rubenstein, 1980; M. G. Smith, 1957; 1962; R. T. Smith, 1956; 1967). Researchers argue that family and kinship practices must be defined by the conditions and experiences of present-day society. For example, Edith Clarke and others concerned with poverty in the post-slavery era suggest that Afro-Caribbean people of a lower social status adopted non-nuclear family structures and distinct conjugal unions and kinship practices as survival strategies for coping with oppressive social and economic marginalisation.

Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices are seen as the result of personal choice by other researchers concerned with the impact of economic marginalisation upon familial relationships (Rodman, 1971; Rubenstein, 1980). According to this perspective, family relationships result from individual responses to economic conditions. Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices are viewed as culturally appropriate responses to economic deprivation and uncertainty. For example, marginalised males elect to engage in familial relationships that do not carry the economic burdens associated with European expectations of the role of husband, father, and primary family breadwinner. Rodman (1971) reports that men of lower-status families are prevented from fulfilling the expected familial role of provider because of occupational handicaps, such as unemployment, under-employment, poorly-paid employment and unskilled employment. As a result, men engage in alternative family and kinship practices that are better suited to their social and economic circumstances.

The personal choices of lower-class individuals concerning family and kinship practices are assumed to be constrained by a desire to conform to European family norms. For instance, non-nuclear family practices such as the birth of illegitimate children and non-marital unions are not viewed as

desirable practices by the individual or the community; nonetheless, these practices are broadly accepted by the community. The gap between desired familial preferences and actual familial practices is seen as “stretching” the dominant European family norm (Rodman, 1971; Rubenstein, 1980). Such “stretching” of the dominant European family norms by individuals provides more flexible and economically viable family and kinship practices that are socially acceptable to the community (Rubenstein, 1980).

The family models of Blake (1961) and Clarke (1957), as well as Rodman (1971) and Rubenstein (1980), link Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices to group and individual responses to limited social and economic opportunities. The influences of traditional African family cultural beliefs, values and practices are excluded from these family models. The models identify European family norms as the norm and most functional for individuals, groups and societies. Patterns of Afro-Caribbean family structures, conjugal unions and kinship practices are compared with European family practices and viewed as functional adaptations by marginalised individuals, families, and groups, but dysfunctional for the society. Thus, assumptions of the inherent superiority of European family norms are implicit in these models.

Other researchers link Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices to the nature of a socially stratified plural society (M. G. Smith, 1957; 1965; 1962; R. T. Smith, 1956; 1967; 1988).<sup>4</sup> M. G. Smith argues that in the plural society, different sub-cultural groups are relatively separated. These sub-cultural groups each have distinct norms, values and social arrangements, and without a dominant set of norms, society is relatively chaotic and unstable (1956). The cultural norms of sub-cultural groups may become associated with colour or ethnicity because of the hierarchy of political dominance. In particular, non-nuclear family and kinship practices are considered characteristic of lower-class Afro-Caribbean sub-cultures, and are indicative of the lack of acculturation to European family norms (M. G. Smith, 1965). The politically dominant segment of society is acculturated to European norms, and social mobility is associated with acculturation.

On the other hand, R. T. Smith (1956; 1967; 1988) views family and kinship practices in relation to the hierarchical organisation of society. In the plural society, social economic segments are differentiated by class and colour and may have a unique set of cultural practices relative to family and kinship practices. However, European family norms are practiced to a greater degree by the middle and upper classes, but are seen as desirable norms by all social

status groups. Thus the non-nuclear family and kinship practices of the lower classes are linked to the degree of assimilation. For example, female-headed Afro-Caribbean households are seen as a stage in the assimilation process in which males are economically marginalised. The presence of family and kinship practices that are similar to traditional African cultures are not linked to African cultural influences, but to social class experiences in the plural society. In this context, R. T. Smith views traditional African culture as unimportant to analyses of family and kinship practices (1967; 1988).

The assumption common to the work of M. G. Smith and R. T. Smith is that contemporary social institutions, such as family and kinship networks, cannot be the result of cultural and historical factors. However, European family norms, in one way or another, are important in the assimilation process and play a major role in family and kinship practices. These researchers therefore exclude the influence of traditional African culture in their analysis of the family, but include the influence of European culture. Moreover, the uncritical acceptance of European family norms as the ideal suggests a cultural bias that can result in negative value orientation towards non-European family and kinship practices.

### **Indifference to African cultural influence**

The researchers whose family models are identified as being indifferent to African cultural influences adopt the perspective that traditional African culture contributed to the development of societal norms, but no longer has a direct influence on contemporary family and kinship practices. This perspective assumes a set of shared family norms that are part of a dominant Caribbean creole culture.<sup>5</sup> These shared norms are believed to have emerged from a blending of various traditional ethnic cultures, primarily African and European, as well as the common experience of slavery and colonisation. Douglas (1992) suggests that non-nuclear forms of Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices persist in contemporary society and across social classes because they are part of a set of shared cultural norms unique to the Caribbean. Implicit in the family models of these researchers is the historical role of African culture in the establishment of Caribbean social norms, particularly family and kinship practices. The family models of these researchers do not make comparisons to European family norms, either as a desired ideal or point of reference.

Researchers believe that individuals and groups have different living experiences because of class, gender and colour distinctions in creole societies

(Alexander, 1977; 1984; Douglass, 1992; Manyoni, 1977; 1980). Accordingly, while there are a set of shared family norms in the creole society, family and kinship relationships will be practiced differently by the various social classes. Differences in familial practices according to social class are seen as a matter of degree, and result from differences in social meanings that are ascribed to family and kinship practices. The assumption underlying these family models is that the set of creolised norms are the desired norms of the upper and middle classes. Alexander (1984), for example, reported that while illegitimate children and non-legal conjugal unions are practised by middle- and lower-class Jamaican families, society associates these familial relationships with black lower-class behaviour. Similarly, in Barbados, having illegitimate children was viewed as part of normal life by lower-class women, but for middle-class women, having children through marriage was considered more desirable (Manyoni, 1977).

These family models also highlight the importance of colour in the stratification system, where dark skin is associated with the lower classes (Alexander, 1977; 1984). Colour and class interactions are believed to have an effect on family and kinship practices. Alexander for example, argues that non-nuclear family and kinship practices are viewed as undesirable, and although found in all social classes, are the expected behaviour of the black lower social status groups, particularly black men (1977). Societal beliefs hold that black lower-class males engage in irresponsible sexual behaviour and do not make good partners or fathers. The negative value orientation associated with black is sometimes compensated for by class status, in particular, in the selection of mates for marriage and/or parenting. Educated black women and women of colour, for example, prefer to have children within marriage, and middle-class women with illegitimate children marry men with good occupations. In some instances, a person of a darker skin tone would be considered a good partner and spouse if he or she was of a similar or higher social status (Alexander, 1977; 1984).

African cultural influence on family and kinship practices is included in family models of the creole society to the extent that these influences are assumed to have played a role in producing a set of indigenous shared family norms and practices. The models, however, are indifferent to the role of traditional African culture in shaping and giving meaning to contemporary familial forms and practices. Patterns of family and kinship practices are linked instead to social class, colour and gender experiences.

## The inclusion of African cultural influence

Nevertheless, a review of Caribbean family literature shows a concerted and persistent attempt to include African cultural influences in family models across theoretical perspectives. This interest has been central to research seeking to explain the existence and persistence of non-European forms of family and kinship practices, gender roles and gender identities across social classes and periods of economic change.

There are two very different thrusts in the literature on the influence of traditional African culture in Afro-Caribbean family models. One approach views slave families as the product of African traditional family practices that survived the harsh conditions of slavery and plantation life. This approach emphasises the centrality of historical cultural influences on the family. A second approach includes the influence of traditional African culture as an ideological factor in family models of both slave and contemporary Afro-Caribbean families. Emphasis is placed on human beings as active agents who negotiate their social realities based on past and present experiences and understandings. What these approaches have in common is the use of historical and contemporary social and structural factors in understanding the Afro-Caribbean family.

The explicit inclusion of African culture as a factor in understanding Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices is illustrated in literature concerned with the origins of slave family and kinship practices. Researchers believe that Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices arose, in part, because of the retention and/or re-interpretation of African traditions and practices (Craton, 1979; Herskovits, 1958; Higman, 1973; 1974; 1978; Mintz and Price, 1976). Melville Herskovits, for example, argues that slave family structures and kinship practices are founded on the fundamental principles of African kinship systems, as well as the harsh conditions of slavery. Slavery and the plantation system could not totally suppress traditional African cultural patterns, and some African family traditions survived (1958).

Other researchers argue that slavery did not hold such absolute power and domination that slaves could not fashion their own way of life, including rebuilding family and kinship structures (Craton, 1979; Higman, 1973; 1974; 1978; Mintz and Price, 1976). The assumption of these researchers is that the beliefs, customs and practices brought by Africans cannot simply be erased from memory and will eventually reappear in some form. For example, Mintz and Price (1976) argue that slavery made it difficult for Africans to maintain specific African familial structures, but African slaves nevertheless drew on their traditional African family norms to form new familial relations.

The notion that slavery totally disrupted traditional family ties and practices is also refuted by researchers who have examined plantation documents and slave records. Findings of both nuclear and extended families among slaves led researchers to suspect that both European family norms and traditional African family norms contributed to slave family and kinship practices. Plantation records show that the nuclear family was the common among slaves, but that there were significant numbers of female-headed slave households. These researchers also found that there were strong family bonds in the extended family and kinship networks of slaves (Craton, 1979; Higman, 1973). Moreover, Craton (1979) suggests that the strong family bonds, the extended family relationships, and the kinship ties developed into networks of cohesive villages similar to village life in Africa.

These models of slave families view traditional African family culture as one of the elements that explain Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices. They also suggest that the impact of traditional African family influences was more evident in the kinship practices of slaves than in slave family structures. These models do not include implicit or explicit comparisons to “ideal” European family norms, as both nuclear and non-nuclear slave family and kinship practices are seen as legitimate family forms.

A second approach also includes the influence of traditional African cultural values in family models of both slave and contemporary families. This approach emerges in the gender-centred family literature within a feminist theoretical framework. The family models of this approach view traditional African culture as having an influence on the gender ideologies of the Caribbean. These gender ideologies are used by Afro-Caribbean women and men to negotiate their social positions in the domestic and public realms of their lives (Barriteau, 1998; Rajack-Talley, 2004; Reddock, 1985; 1998; Mohammed, 1998; Momsen, 1998; 2002).<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, gender roles and gender identities in the family, in conjugal unions and in kinship practices are negotiated entities within specific ideological, social and economic parameters.

The link between ideology, gender roles and gender identities is found in family models that focus on both the slave family and contemporary familial relationships. Some researchers focus on the role of women-centred ideology and slave women's resistance to race, class and gender domination in the home and workplace (Besson, 1998; Massiah, 1982; Mohammed, 1998; Momsen, 1993; 1998; 2002; Morrissey, 1998; Rajack-Talley, 2004; Reddock, 1998). Other researchers examine the links between male-centred ideologies,



perceptions about masculinity and men's role in the family (Barrow, 1997, 1998; Black, 1995; Branche, 1997; Chevannes, 1993). A common thread seen in the work of these researchers is a focus on the intersection of ideology, human agency and structural economic factors.

Researchers who investigate slave women's resistance to race, class and gender domination argue that enslaved African women drew on their traditional gender ideologies and practices to negotiate the conditions of slavery and family life (Momsen, 1993; 1988; 2002; Morrissey, 1998; Rajack-Talley, 2004; Reddock, 1998). In particular, traditional matrifocal and matrilineal<sup>7</sup> beliefs and practices that promote female autonomy and independence were important in framing women-centred ideologies (Mair, 1975; Mathurin-Mair, 2000; Massiah, 1982). Slave women used these ideologies to negotiate their roles as workers, mothers and heads of households. For example, the conditions of plantation life were such that women were treated as individual workers, and were economically independent of a male partner in the household and family. In addition, women became household heads as men were often separated from women and children under conditions of slavery. Researchers believe that slave women drew on matrifocal-oriented gender ideologies in order to be effective in their economic and social roles central to female-headed households and extended family networks (Massiah, 1984; Momsen, 1988; 2002; Morrissey, 1998; Rajack-Talley, 2004; Reddock, 1995). These roles are exemplified by grandmothers and great-grandmothers who became powerful and respected individuals in the family and slave communities. According to Beckles (1989), these matriarchs took up the responsibility of maintaining strong family bonds and kinship ties, as well as raising the social status of their children, grandchildren and other members of the extended family.

Afro-Caribbean women in contemporary society also draw on women-centred ideologies to negotiate their positions in society and within the household (Mohammed, 1998; Momsen, 1998; Rajack-Talley, 2004; Reddock, 1998). The influence of these ideologies was important because the economic environment in the period following slavery placed great economic and social burdens on Afro-Caribbean women. For instance, the economic decline of the plantation system in Caribbean societies resulted in the mass migration of men in search of work. As a result, women had to assume the role of major breadwinner in female-headed households (Momsen, 1998; Reddock, 1995; Shepherd, 1999). Many women linked to the land and became peasant farmers or plantation labourers, while others migrated into towns to work as domestics,

seamstresses, washers, street vendors and petty traders (Shepherd, 1999). Women used women-centred ideologies to help negotiate these conditions and effectively play the roles of single parent and sole provider in their households and families.

Male-centred ideologies are also believed to be influential for Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices. In particular, researchers view perceptions of masculinity and sexuality, and the male role within the family and kinship networks, as emerging from male-centred ideologies indigenous to the Caribbean (Barrow, 1997; 1998; Black, 1995; Branche, 1997; Chevannes, 1993). These male-centred ideologies are linked to African cultural influences, including traditional male roles and practices in the family. Polygamy in the Caribbean, in particular, has been identified as having its origins in Africa (Beckles, 1989). Others are more sceptical of the direct link between Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices and traditional African beliefs and practices. Nonetheless, they recognise the similarities and the possibility that traditional African culture has some influence on the Afro-Caribbean family (Craton, 1978; Higman, 1976).

Researchers have found that within the male-centred ideologies, male perceptions of masculinity and sexuality are linked to men's sexual prowess and status in the family and society (Barrow, 1997; Branche, 1997; Chevannes, 1993). Status is drawn from the fulfilment of the male role in family and kin networks. Fatherhood, for example, is most commonly associated with ceremonial events and child maintenance (Black, 1995). This, of course, is dependent upon the abilities of the male to be a financial provider. In Jamaica, men will get married if they feel that they are economically secure, but they also perceive common-law unions and visiting relationships as normal familial relationships. Non-legal conjugal forms are not seen by men as constituting casual sexual relations (Chevannes, 1993). Similarly, Branche (1997) reports that teenage boys define male roles and responsibilities according to their perceptions of masculinity and the economic stability of men. They believe that economic circumstances can prevent men from considering marriage and engaging in stable sexual relationships. Thus, serial conjugal relationships are viewed as economically appropriate, as well as an expression of masculine sexual prowess.

These findings led researchers to conclude that although Caribbean males view marriage as a sacred institution, they also engage in conjugal unions that are acceptable to society and appropriate to their economic situations.

The non-legal conjugal unions offer sexual freedom, have limited economic responsibilities, and are linked to expressions of masculinity (Barrow 1997; 1998; Branche, 1997; Chevannes, 1993).

From a gender perspective, both women-centred and male-centred gender ideologies are viewed as factors influencing Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices. The family models of these researchers include the influence of traditional African culture as a key contributor in the development of Caribbean gender ideologies. These gender ideologies help men and women define their roles and identities in family and kinship relations within specific social and economic conditions. The models thus assume that human agency is the link between social structure, culture and social meaning. Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices are not compared with idealised European family norms. Moreover, these models take into consideration the specific historical, political and economic contexts in which individuals and groups ascribe meaning to and define family and kinship practices.

## Conclusions

This review of family literature illustrates the wide variation of research foci and theoretical perspectives used in family studies in the Caribbean. The literature was examined in terms of orientation toward the influence of traditional African culture on Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices. The study found that all the orientations considered the influence of traditional African culture, but in different ways. Analysis of these orientations accentuates the influence of ethnocentric bias on comparative normative standards and the conceptual models of the Afro-Caribbean family. The analysis reveals that ethnocentric bias affects the models and assumptions of researchers who negate the influence of traditional African culture. The models that are indifferent towards or inclusive of the influence of traditional African culture implicitly reject a Eurocentric approach. In particular, the feminist approach is critical of the Eurocentric and male biases that dominate the literature; instead, it incorporates both historical and contemporary social forces into the understanding of family and kinship practices.

The analysis of the literature shows that all theoretical perspectives, in some ways, address the issue of traditional African cultural influences on family and kinship practices. Some researchers negate the influence of traditional African culture, but must nevertheless engage in a debate as to why traditional African culture is not a factor in family and kinship practices. Other researchers work from the assumption that traditional African culture was once of historical

significance to the development of creolised Caribbean family norms, but is no longer a factor influencing contemporary Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices. Finally, perspectives that include the influence of traditional African cultures present arguments about the historical and contemporary significance of this influence on Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices. Traditional African family and kinship practices are assumed to have survived in the form of various gender ideologies, and continue to be reflected in Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices.

Ethnocentric bias was found to dominate many of the earlier studies on Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices. This bias is demonstrated by the adoption and uncritical use of European norms as the standard. The ethnocentric bias implicit in these perspectives invariably compares slave or Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices with those of a mythical European norm. In some instances, slave and Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices are interpreted as promiscuous, unstable and deviant. In other cases, they are interpreted as functional for the individual or group, but dysfunctional for larger society. In both instances, it is assumed that that individuals and groups will achieve upward social mobility only through the adoption of European family norms.

Perspectives that argue that traditional African culture had and continues to have an effect on slave and Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices reject ethnocentric bias. These perspectives adopt the position that slave and Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices could have both European and African cultural influences. There is no comparison to dominant European norms, and Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices are viewed as being culturally distinct. The absence of ethnocentric bias allows the researchers to focus on positive aspects, such as stable family and kinship networks, as well as the central economic and social roles of women in slave and contemporary Afro-Caribbean families.

This assessment of the Caribbean family literature reveals the critical role of the feminist perspectives in Afro-Caribbean family studies. These feminist perspectives are the most critical of ethnocentric and male-oriented biases, and respond by suggesting new research foci and methodologies for understanding the Afro-Caribbean family. The social relations of family and kinship patterns are viewed within social, economic and political contexts. As a result, gender ideologies and the role of human agency are given central importance to the processes involved in family and kinship practices. Family and conjugal unions

are treated as arenas of social conflict in which gender roles, gender identities and familial relationships are negotiated. This approach was found to be the most successful in guiding explanations about the existence, persistence and social meanings of Afro-Caribbean family and kinship practices.

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## Footnotes

- 1 Among these forms are common-law unions, consisting of a man and woman living together as husband and wife, but who are not legally married. Visiting relationships occur where a man and woman have a stable conjugal union, but are not legally married or co-habituating. In these relationships, there may be children by both partners. In some Caribbean societies, common-law relationships are recognised by the laws of that country, and in most Caribbean societies, common-law unions are socially accepted. The same recognition and consideration is not given to visiting relationships.
- 2 There is an ongoing debate on the social construction of a universal family model defined as nuclear, the married conjugal pair with children living in the same household held up as an ideal model. Moreover, there is also much disagreement on whether this family model is essentially European. In the Caribbean, the concept of the nuclear family as the ideal and European is debated within the context of varying degrees of ethnocentric bias in defining the family.
- 3 This literature is comprised of different theoretical approaches and research objectives that sometimes overlap around common themes. Caribbean family literature has generally been organised according to theoretical approaches and/or chronological order (see Barrow, 1996) and value orientation (see Rajack-Talley and Talley, 2005).
- 4 The plural society is viewed differently by these researchers. See M. G. Smith (1965) on the plural society in the British West Indies and R. T. Smith (1967) on social stratification, cultural pluralism and integration in West Indian societies.
- 5 E. Brathwaite (1971) provides a detailed discussion that explains the development of a creole society in Jamaica. M. G. Smith and R. T. Smith also debate the creole society within a plural society context.
- 6 The gender ideology indigenous to the Caribbean is built upon the historical experiences of the women and men who came to the region as slaves or indentured servants, as well as the influences of the gender ideologies of their original birthplaces (Mohammed, 1998; Momsen, 1993; 2002; Rajack-Talley, 2004). This experience includes a disruption of traditional gender systems during slavery and the post-emancipation periods, and the imposition of European



patriarchy alongside inherited gender ideologies in every aspect of social life, including religion and family life and structures (Rajack-Talley, 2004).

- 7 Matrifocal refers to the central role of women in everyday life, whereas matrilineal refers to the practice of determining one's ancestry through the maternal line.

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