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Dynamic Anthropology: Tensions between Theory and Practice

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KEYNOTE LECTURE ABSTRACT

Thursday, October 6th 2011, 9.30 am

House of Sciences and Letters (Tieteiden talo), Room 104, Kirkkokatu 6, 00170 Helsinki

**Narratives of Migration and Return:
Family and Gender among Caribbean Women**

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A key issue in migration research has been migrant women's apparent difficulty combining their traditional role as the main caregiver in the family they leave behind with their new role as labour migrants working in far-away places. There has been particular concern with the emotional strain associated with women's absence from close family and the moral problems that emerge because female migration is perceived to challenge established family and gender norms. Much of this research has been based on interviews with migrant women relating their departing from home, working in a foreign land and longing for the family left behind. Through an analysis of life stories told by Caribbean migrant women, I will show that accounts of migrant experiences cannot be viewed as simply factual descriptions. They should also be understood as narratives that give meaning and purpose to individuals' lives. Thus, in their accounts the women deploy the gendered narrative of the good migrant relative which reaffirms their continued loyalty to the family left behind and their position as morally responsible persons worthy of social recognition. This analysis points to the close connection between accounts of migration experiences and the building of family relations and gender roles. Furthermore, it suggests that family and gender not only shape people's lives, but are a malleable resource that can be (re)shaped to validate a variety of life courses.