

SHINING A LIGHT ON WINDRUSH AND THE CYCLE OF BROKEN ATTACHMENTS

Honouring the work of Dr Elaine Arnold

Interview by Audrey James

Introduction: In a world where resilience and dedication often go unnoticed, it is crucial to recognise the remarkable individuals who have made a lasting impact. Dr Elaine Arnold, a pioneering author of "Working with Families of African Caribbean Origin: Understanding Issues around Immigration and Attachment (2011)" and the director of Supporting Relationships and Families (SRF), is one such visionary. Through her ground-breaking work in understanding the effects of separation and reunion in African Caribbean families, she has brought healing and empowerment to countless lives. In this engaging interview, we dive deep into Dr Arnold's journey, highlighting the paradoxes and ironies surrounding the Windrush generation and the profound impact of broken attachments.

Dr Arnold's Insight: "When we address the impact of parents leaving their children and the challenges faced when they reunited, we uncover a deeply complex and emotional journey that deserves our attention," Dr Arnold shares. As a keynote speaker at the Black and Asian Therapist Network Conference in 2012, she captivated the audience with her perspective on the experiences of individuals like herself who were left behind in the Caribbean.

A Journey from Barbados to the UK: Born, raised and educated up to secondary school level, in Barbados. Discrimination was practiced in Barbados, which prevented even the bright black students from being given the opportunity to go on to further education. Dr Arnold, like other black children, was not selected to go on to higher education purely on the basis of the colour of her skin. This led to Dr Arnold later moving to Trinidad and Tobago to pursue a career in education. Witnessing the consequences of parents leaving their children due to economic hardships, she became determined to understand and support those affected. In 1955, driven by a desire to help families navigate the complexities of separation, she set her sights on the UK to further her studies.

The Birth of Supporting Relationships and Families (SRF): "It was essential to bridge the gap between therapists and individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, to create a safe space where healing and understanding could flourish," Dr Arnold emphasises.

Because of racism and her passion for aiding those struggling to achieve, and with others who had experienced separation, they decided to hold a focus group, with the working title of Separation and Reunion, after which a conference was held and this was the beginning of the organisation with Dr Arnold as chair. This unique organisation, 25 years on, aims to provide support and guidance to individuals navigating the challenges of broken attachments.

Unravelling the Paradoxes of Windrush: "Windrush represents a poignant and paradoxical chapter in the migration history. Mothers, seeking a better future, left their children behind to come to the so-called 'motherland,'" Dr Arnold explains. The profound impact of this separation and the subsequent challenges of reuniting with their children became the focus of her research. Through exploring attachment theory, she shed light on the consequences of broken attachments and the deep-seated fear of abandonment.

The Cycle of Broken Attachments: Mothers were employed on a shift system and therefore were not able to encourage attachment with their children. Witnessing the adverse circumstances of parents in one of the care homes, Dr Arnold observed how young children, who were separated from their mothers, would cling to the nursery staff and to her when she visited.

Dr Arnold discovered that broken attachment patterns are not easily healed. "Children who were left behind and later joined their parents often struggled to form secure attachments, mirroring their parents' experiences," she reveals. The fear of being left again perpetuates a cycle of insecure relationships, leading individuals to build protective walls around their hearts.

Supporting Relationships and Families: SRF's work became a catalyst for change, offering a lifeline to those affected by broken attachments. "We created a supportive community where individuals could openly share their experiences and gain valuable insights," Dr Arnold explains. By providing a platform for open discussions, educational conferences, and publications, SRF emphasises healing and nurturing healthy relationships. The organisation's inclusive approach embraced

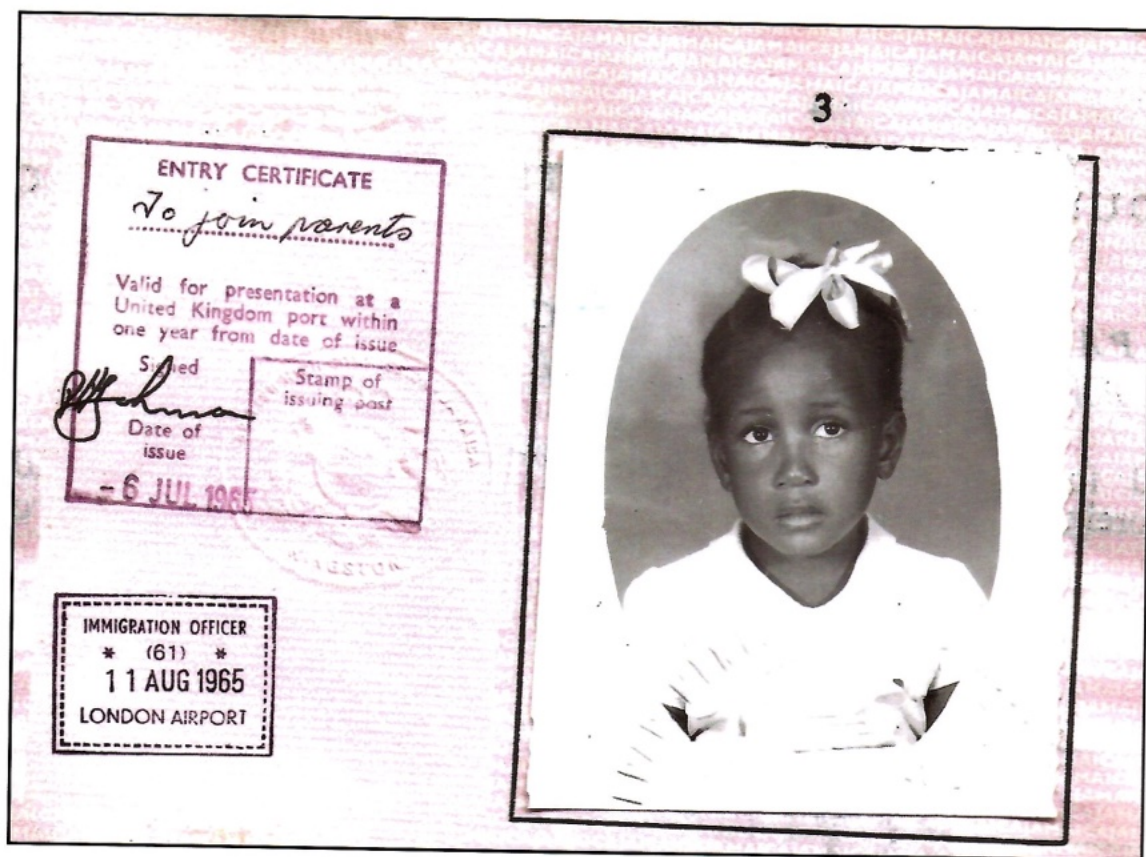
various family structures and cultural backgrounds, recognising that healing knows no boundaries.

Looking Ahead: Dr Arnold's impactful journey continues to inspire. As her work receives recognition and honours by being awarded an OBE this year, she remains dedicated to the well-being of individuals and families. "The emotional toll of listening to others in distress is outweighed by the knowledge that my efforts have made a difference," she reflects. In asking Dr Arnold about her hopes for the organisation, she stated "My hope, is that one day soon, we will receive enough funds to own our building. This will enable us to offer a permanent secure base to the individuals and families we work with." Dr Arnold's unwavering commitment to understanding and healing broken attachments has touched the lives of many.

Honouring Dr Elaine Arnold's Legacy: We are reminded of the complexities and paradoxes embedded within the Windrush generation in celebrating Dr Arnold's extraordinary contributions. By shining a light

on the effects of broken attachments and advocating for healing and understanding, she has left an indelible mark on the lives of African Caribbean families. Let us honour her remarkable legacy.

For further information visit <http://www.serefo.org.uk/index.html>



Passport photo of Audrey James aged 5 1/2, and entry certificate, for coming to join her parents on 11 August 1965