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research

Bringing transnational families from the margins to the centre of family studies in Britain

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[[This abstract has been copyedited but please reduce it to no more than 150 words as per the journal's instructions for authors]] Britain, alongside other Western contemporary societies, has undergone important social and demographic transformations resulting from increased migration, ethnic plurality and multiculturalism. One important change is that family life is increasingly practised across national borders. Research on transnational families, specifically within the field of migration studies, has been pivotal in highlighting the maintenance of family networks across national borders and geographical distance, as well as the mechanisms, processes and practices sustaining these family relations. Yet, rather surprisingly, a detailed analysis of family relationships that are practised across international borders is a marginal field of enquiry within British family studies. In this article, therefore, we argue the case for bringing transnational family studies into the 'mainstream' academic field of family studies, by highlighting the importance of transnational families as an analytical concept for understanding contemporary family life in Britain. We do so by drawing on examples from our respective studies on Caribbean and Italian transnational family relationships to (re)frame concepts typically associated with British family studies, such as for example what is meant by the 'normative family', everyday practices involved in 'doing family' and the notion of 'families of choice'.

key words transnational families • migration • ethnicity • family practices

Introduction

[[as per the journal's instructions for authors, the number of key words has been reduced to 4 ~ are you happy with these 4 Britain alongside other Western contemporary societies has undergone important social and demographic transformations resulting from increased migration, ethnic plurality and multiculturalism (Goulbourne et al, 2010). One important change is that family life is increasingly practised across national borders as family members migrate, leaving behind in Britain their parents, spouses, children, siblings and other kin (Kilkey and Merla, 2013). **[[missing referenc** Research on transnational families, specifically within the field of migration studies, has been pivotal in highlighting the maintenance of family networks across national borders and geographical distance, as well as the

mechanisms, processes and practices sustaining these family relations (Bryceson and Vourela, 2002; Parreñas, 2005; Baldassar, 2007). Yet, rather surprisingly, a detailed analysis of family relationships that are practised across international borders is a marginal field of enquiry within British family studies. Leading scholars writing on family and intimate relations (Heath et al, 2001 **[[missing reference ~ or do you mean 2011 as cited later and listed in the References]]**; Jamieson, 2011; Morgan, 2011) have commented on the relative absence of transnational families from the current trend of sociological enquiry, which focuses on exploring the factors that shape and constitute the diversity of everyday family life. In this article, therefore, we argue the case for bringing transnational family studies into the 'mainstream' academic field of family studies.

[[there were several very long paragraphs and these have been broken where considered appropriate so that the text looks less dense for the reader ~ if you can see any other paragraphs that can be broken please indicate where]] Many of the themes on transnational families that we present here will resonate with scholars working in the field of migration studies. We are not seeking to generate new knowledge for this audience; rather, what we are attempting to do is to increase the visibility of transnational family studies as a field of enquiry within British family studies by arguing the case for the importance of transnational families as an analytical concept for understanding contemporary family life in Britain. We will do so by drawing on examples from our respective studies on Italian and Caribbean transnational family relationships, which we have been researching for the last 10 years (see, for example, **authors' references; blinded for review purposes [[please replace with the relevant citations]]**.

Engaging transnational families as an analytical tool can be usefully applied to (re) framing concepts typically associated with British family studies, such as, for example, what is meant by the 'normative family', everyday practices involved in 'doing family' and the notion of 'families of choice'. This discussion further highlights the subjective and culturally specific nature of family life (and what constitutes a family) by drawing attention to the way these wider framings have been obscured from analysis in recent times. Our discussion of Caribbean and Italian transnational families highlights the complex interplay between emotional and geographical distance and proximity and the way in which constructions of 'the family' are located at these intersections, alongside boundaries of gender, 'race'/ethnicity, social class and nation. We further attend to the sociocultural and structural environment that shapes transnational family relationships by briefly reflecting on how the current neoliberal political climate, alongside increased restrictions on immigration for non-European migrants through legislation, influences transnational kinship practices.

Research background

This article is based on our ongoing research of Caribbean and Italian transnational families in Britain, which originated out of two qualitative studies conducted by a research group of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), as well as on our theoretical engagement with the field of transnational migration and transnational families more specifically.[1] The group's work focused on the dynamics of family change and processes of social capital, paying particular attention to identities and values, trust and reciprocity and caring for and about. Our broad perspective on understanding

transnational families led us to examine the lived experiences of family members who are scattered across national boundaries and the issues this raised about migration, identities, communities, resources and relationships in the contemporary world.

The Caribbean project investigated processes of identity formation among Caribbean diaspora youth, looking at how these young people utilised social capital resources within their family relationships and community networks. The material was collected through 30 in-depth interviews with second- and third-generation Caribbean young people and 50 kinship/family members across all age groups in the United Kingdom (UK) **[[you seem to use the terms 'Britain' and 'the UK' interchangeably and yet Britain does not include Northern Ireland ~ use one or the other?]]** and the Caribbean (principally the regions of Barbados, Guyana and Jamaica). The Italian project explored various aspects of family life and social capital. These included the functioning of mutual and reciprocal relations related to care, the role of rituals and the formation of transnational identities. The material was collected through participant observation and 50 in-depth interviews in a number of sites in both the UK and in Italy. Italians from the three main migration flows to the UK (pre-war, post-war and recent student and professional migrants) were interviewed, including both first-generation migrants and their offspring. Since this programme of work ended in 2006 we have developed both joint and individual projects that focus more specifically on transnational networks at specific stages of the lifecourse, such as young adulthood (Reynolds, 2007, 2010; Reynolds and Zontini, 2013a; Reynolds and Zontini, **in press [[please clarify whether this is either in press or forthcoming ~ if in press, this can be replaced with 2014, if forthcoming and to be published this year, then 2014: forthcoming]]**) and old age (Zontini, 2012, 2014).

Caribbeans and Italians are clearly ethnically distinctive groups. We believe that these differences make the two groups, and their family types, suitable for comparison, because through looking at them in relation to each other we can draw attention to the subjective and culturally specific nature of family life, which is often missed from wider sociological debates on family life, and which tend to be 'methodologically nationalist' (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002) **[[missing reference]]** The most immediate and marked difference between the two groups is that they are racially different from one another and as such they occupy a different radicalised and ethicised status in British society.

There has been a plethora of policy debates that have attended to the changing nature of minority ethnic groups and communities in the UK; and the impact on indigenous communities of migrant communities originating from other European states, former Eastern European territories as well as those resulting from Britain's colonial ties to, for example, African, Caribbean and South Asian nations (Solomos and Bulmer, 1999; Gilroy, 2004; Modood, 2007) **[[missing references x3]]** It is not our intention within this article to examine these debates. However, it is important to point to these debates as a way of contextualising the degree of slippage between the concepts of 'race' and ethnicity that we invoke throughout our analysis when drawing comparisons between the two groups.

In Britain, the conceptually distinctive categories of race, ethnicity and national identity have been conflated and collapsed into each other, and the 'contextual slipperiness' of these terms has contributed to problematical and contested understandings of diverse migrant groups in policy debates. Italians, for instance, have

been placed in different racial groups at different times in history and geographical contexts. For example, their 'whiteness' was not always assumed in the United States (US), where they were located at the border of the 'colour line' (Stella, 2002; Guglielmo and Salerno, 2003). **[[missing references x2]]** Today, Southern European migrants' 'whiteness' offers them privileges in contemporary Britain where they can benefit from a different immigration status from mainly 'black' migrants originating from the global South, offering them greater freedom of movement. Yet processes of racialisation continue to be at play for migrants from former Eastern European territories. Those ethnic communities that are constructed as 'white Europeans' enjoy racialised privileges in terms of educational attainment and labour market experiences compared with their 'black' counterparts (see, for example, Heath et al, 2008; Platt, 2011). There are, for example, significant variance between Italians as 'white Europeans' and Caribbeans as black citizens, with regard to differential access to public and welfare services.

In our previous studies we also explored the way in which Italians enjoy the racialised privileges afforded by their 'whiteness' and European citizenship, which in a way are not available or afforded to black Caribbeans on account of their racially subordinated location (Zontini and Reynolds, 2007; Goulbourne et al, 2010; Reynolds and Zontini, 2013b). We have similarly focused attention on conceptualisations of Caribbean and Italian family structures to show the dominant typologies of Caribbean and Italian families, and the way in which these are underpinned by ethnic, racial and cultural constructions (Reynolds and Zontini, 2006, 2007). Caribbean families, for instance, are characterised as adopting a more individualist approach to family life, resulting in fluid and diverse forms of networks and household patterns.[2] Yet within this individualised framework, the self is always understood as relational and situational to others within kin networks (Reynolds, 2006a). Italian and Southern European families, more generally, are understood as having particularly strong intergenerational solidarity whereby the individual is interconnected and interwoven into 'the family'. Despite increased diversity in living arrangements and the disappearance of the traditional extended family households, Italian family members continue to live close to one another, maintaining important economic and emotional links (Zontini, 2006; Baldassar and Gabaccia, 2011). **[[You now move from the present tense to the past tense ~ in the next two sentences are you referring to one of the above studies, or to the research on which this article is based? Clarification/ rewording needed]]** The emphasis on care as central to family lives and the framing of kinship networks as relational and interconnected illuminated points of convergence between the two ethnic groups with regard to their transnational family practices. It also facilitated insights into the ways in which ethnic specific values are attached to the emotional work, reciprocal care and intimate exchanges transcending national borders, and which have not been the primary foci of British family studies.

Understanding family relations in a transnational context

A recent trend among academic scholars researching within the field of British family studies has been to extend the boundaries of intimacy research in order to assess the divergent understandings of what constitutes a 'family' and the ways in which individuals live their personal lives (McCarthy-Ribbens and Edwards, 2011; McKie and Callann, 2012). In particular, the individualisation thesis provides the bedrock

of much of contemporary family studies and the conceptual framework through which family and intimate relations are understood, analysed and contested (Gabb, 2010: 71). This thesis advances narratives of choice, globalisation, the liberalisation of personal attitudes (Giddens, 1992) and the democratisation and detraditionalisation of interpersonal relations (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). Even those critics negatively equating individualism with family breakdown, selfish individuals, the loss of family values and the moral decline of society continue to expound the elasticity and stretching boundaries of personal life (Davies, 1993; Morgan, **[[D or P?]]** 1996).

Questions have also been raised about the extent to which families have been really transformed into individualised and voluntary networks of interpersonal relationships. Gillies' work (2006), for example, calls attention to the privileged status afforded in society to a very specific (white) middle-class formation of family life. She also recognises that the increasing salience given to individualised, intimate and partnered relations risks undermining the important ways in which families are politically, ethically, culturally, morally and structurally located (Gillies, 2011). While it is certainly clear that 'the family', as constituted by a nuclear household unit, is no longer the most prevalent pattern of family and intimate life in the UK today, this particular family form still has a powerful role in popular, media and policy discourse, and is still positioned and conceptualised as the 'normative family'.

Recent studies on black and migrant families (eg, Kofman et al, 2012 **[[missing reference]]**; Rollock et al, 2013), gay and lesbian families (eg, Weeks et al, 2001; Taylor, 2009) and working-class parenting and families (Gillies, 2006; Vincent and Ball, 2006 **[[missing reference]]**) have been pivotal in challenging this (hetero) normative paradigm, highlighting the complexities and diversities of the way in which families are structured, located, practised, enacted, negotiated and interpreted across historical time and changing social contexts. Migration studies, which have advanced research on transnational families, also contribute another critical lens in disrupting and de-centring the 'normative' status of the 'the family' (see Goulbourne et al, 2010) Yet, and despite of the synergies and parallels with family studies, the study of transnational families continues to be regarded as a separate academic discipline (Heath et al, 2011). In our attempt to draw on the range of family literature across a range of fields, it is readily apparent that both 'mainstream' British family studies and transnational family studies in the UK context have been heavily influenced by David Morgan's work, particularly by his concept of 'family practices' (Morgan, **[[D or P?]]** 1996). This concept explores the relational connections that express the everyday reality of family relations, including the routinised activities and practices that take place within family networks. Analysis also draws attention to how families are created through sets of caring and intimate relationships and exchanges, and the way different acts of care facilitate the maintenance of relational ties (Morgan, 1996 **[[D or P?]]**; Williams, 2004). The relationality and fluidity in the definition of family boundaries is a point also developed by Finch (2007: 66–7), who highlights the need for both 'doing' and 'displaying' families.

Framed in this way, we can see how transnational families extend the boundaries and ideological gaze of family studies to generate ideas around connectedness, relationality and 'networks of intimacy' (Jamieson, 1998: 76) of family practices that operate and transcend geographical borders. Studies focused on transnational families, for instance, have long since relied on displaying families through the use of visual artefacts, such as photographs and videos, to maintain social connections

among geographically dispersed family members (Reynolds, 2006b) **[[Just 2006? There is no a or b in the References]]** and also to reaffirm cultural and social belonging (Zontini, 2004; Reynolds and Zontini, 2013b). Yet, transnational family studies as an academic field of enquiry deepen our understanding about the level of complexity involved in maintaining the multi-stranded social relations, networks and processes actively linking together, and simultaneously connecting, migrants to two or more nation states (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004). A primary characteristic of transnational families, for instance, is having members spread out across nation states but still maintaining a sense of collective welfare and unity. Bonizzoni and Boccagno **[[please check spelling ~ spelt Boccagni in the References]]** (2013) talk of transnational families as those that are involved in everyday attempts to socially and emotionally bridge distance and re-establish proximity and practices to this end. Other empirical studies investigate family practices involving multidirectional, reciprocal and relational networks that span nation states as well as virtual/'real world' borders (Erel, 2012; Lutz and Palenga-Mollenbeck, 2012; Baldassar and Merla, 2013). The family practices that flow and are exchanged across distances also bring to the fore gender, ethnic, generational and class divisions, as well as differences between 'poor' migrant workers and the professional elites (Foner, 2002; Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004; Coles and Fecther, 2007 **[[missing reference ~ there is a Coles and Fechter reference in the References but it is stated as 2012?]]**; Grillo, 2008; King and Christou, 2010 **[[missing reference]]**; Ryan and Mulholland, 2013).

There is little doubt that changes in roles and responsibilities and the patterning of relationships and household structures directly result from migration (Bryceson and Vourela, 2002; Goulbourne et al, 2010; Baldassar and Gabaccia, 2011). Previously explored in the literature, for instance, has been the way migration may encourage the intergenerational 'care deficit' as parents migrate, leaving behind their children to be cared for by adult kin (Parreñas, 2005), or equally adult children leaving behind their older relatives to be cared for by non-kin (Vullnetari and King, 2006; Baldassar et al, 2007 **[[missing reference]]**), and also the devolution of parenting responsibilities to migrant children in the country of destination (Phoenix and Bauer, 2012). Yet, transnational families also clearly demonstrate the resilience of family ties. We suggest that rather than fragmenting or disintegrating as a result of migration, family relationships simply transform and are reconstituted in new forms such as for example in the case of 'Skype mothering' (Madianou and Miller, 2011; Palenga-Möllenbeck, 201[illegible] **[[missing reference]]**) where mother–child relationships and practices of intimacy are conducted from a distance and in mediated form. By drawing attention to the way families become reformed we acknowledge that there is a danger of dichotomising old versus new types of family formation, and reifying families from 'here' versus families from 'there' in invoking this argument. Nonetheless, we feel that there is value in highlighting the reformulation of families following migration because it raises important ideological questions about what it means to be a family in contemporary Britain, and the cultural specificity that underpins understandings and meanings around notions of 'the family' among different ethnic groups.

In the following sections, we use for illustrative purposes, material collected from our interviews with Caribbean and Italian families to investigate how their transnational family networks question our understanding of the 'normative family' ideal. We then assess how practices of intimacy are practised across distance and the interplay between structure and agency in determining family relations and practices.

Rethinking 'normative family' practices

In recent years, much of the discussion within family discourse has been about the differences that exist between our experiences of family life (the families we live with) versus the idealised images of what we think our families ought to be like (the families we live by) (Gillis, 1996). It is argued that the normative family is what people aspire to, the ideal that guides their behaviour, which is a discourse that is quite distinct from the practice and reality of everyday lived experiences (Morgan, 2004; Williams, 2004). The study of transnational families raises a whole range of important issues about the way the 'normative family' gets reconstituted and reconceptualised in society.

Many migrants involved in family practices across distance are actively engaged in sustaining the idealised 'normative family' image through their economic care labour **[[state simply as paid care work]]** in their country of origin. While migration studies recognise the economic care labour **[[paid care work]]** provided by poor female migrant workers from the Global South (Parreñas, 2001), a relatively unacknowledged issue is the way that privileged, often middle-class women and men in the Global North directly rely on and benefit from migrant workers living within the idealised model of family life of the nuclear household (Pelechova, **unpublished PhD thesis**). **[[please replace with the relevant year and add to the References]]** Delegating care to these workers (as nannies, au pairs, cleaners, carers and domestic workers) at cheap and affordable rates means that family care practices do not rely on members living within extended kin households (Zontini, 2010 **[[a or b?]]**; Pojmann, 2011). The contribution of migrant workers in reproducing this heteronormative model of family life for the privileged groups in society, and the way they enable these groups to derive social, moral and economic benefits from living the 'normative' family ideal, are rarely highlighted in analyses.

Typically ignored and downplayed in British family studies literature are also the different understandings attributed to what constitutes the 'normative family' (the family we live by) resulting from 'race', ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Our interviews with Italian families highlighted that among our participants 'the family' they idealised and aspired to be was constructed in dialogue, and often in opposition, to what is perceived to be 'the normative family' for the 'majority' (ie, White-British) population. In the Italian study, Rosanna, **[[have all names been changed to protect anonymity? – it would be useful to say something to this effect]]** for instance, used the example of her son who has an Italian and English grandfather to highlight what she regarded as the 'normative' and distinctive features of the Italian family: strong intergenerational relations, intimacy and closeness even across geographical and linguistic barriers:

> 'It's really strange because when I look at my son, his relationship with my father is quite touching 'cos he sort of knows his grandfather…. [H]e's kind of seen him over the years since he was eight months old … he's been to Italy. And my father is typical Italian and is very tactile with children….The last few years when Tim visited … it's quite sweet … they just sort of played cards together, which is quite touching. But with his other grandfather … his Yorkshire grandfather, it's interesting because they speak the same language, share the same English culture and yet they are totally strangers … he's [English grandfather] very cold and not very affectionate towards my son….'

In the same study, Francesca similarly described her family values, centred on cooperation and intergenerational solidarity, as opposed to those of individualism that in her view characterised the idealised image of a normative British family:

> 'It's a very positive thing that I'm able to not be completely selfish. I remember when my father went into hospital, some of my English friends were saying: "Why do you have to go every day and you live so far from the hospital?" For me it would be bad not to go. This is very Italian that yourself is part of an extension of something very bigger like *the family*.'

The 'Italian family' ideal is characterised by adult children visiting their parents often and doing small favours for them. When parents become elderly or frail, it is the children's responsibility (usually women) to look after them, ideally at home. Parents for their part are expected to provide economically for their children well into adulthood. They will normally pay for their marriages and buy or help put down a deposit for their first house. The Italian participants we interviewed used this ideal – and not the nuclear individualised family – to judge their own and other people's behaviour. As Baldassar and Gabaccia (2011) have pointed out, families and particular ways of leading intimate lives are at the heart of what it is to be Italian both in Italy and especially in the diaspora. **[[do you mean 'especially in the Italian diaspora community'?]]** Ethnic and national identities are associated with specific family practices – such as 'dedication to close family relations, frequent contact with family, and a commitment to mother–daughter bonds (Baldassar and Gabaccia: 2011: 15) – which are explicitly contrasted with what are perceived as the cold, individualistic and less close attitudes of the majority populations (Wessendorf, 2011).

We observed that among those Caribbean and Italian participants whose notion of normative family did not fit within the British cultural framework there were negative feelings of hurt, guilt and anxiety as they attempted to reconcile their culturally specific norms and expectations of family life with British norms and values. We also observed across both of our studies the internal conflicts within groups as members negotiated and tried to accommodate different and sometimes conflicting normative ideals. Gabriella, for example, a participant in the Italian study, based her normative expectations of family practices on the dominant British cultural model. Consequently, she had the expectations that her career aspirations should take precedence and that her parents would support her through childcare provision. Her parents, however, relying on Italian normative values, believed that it was the younger generation that had the duty to support the older generation, so when they retired to Italy after years of hard work in London, they expected Gabriella to migrate back with them or at least to travel frequently for extended periods to Italy to provide care in their old age and keep the family united. This case was one of several examples of unmet expectations, which resulted from family members having different and in some cases conflicting expectations around 'normative' family practices.

Migrants' normative family ideals offered belonging and a sense of identity but also, as we have seen, were the cause of many tensions. Individuals from both groups, for instance, felt pressures to conform to particular family or cultural practices that they felt were unjust or limiting. The following example, from the Caribbean study, shows how the normative cultural expectation of affluent family members living in the UK (and other Global North countries) to provide financial remittance to family

members 'back home' created conflict and breakdown in family relationships. Tamera, a second-generation migrant and newly qualified medical doctor, commented:

> 'My cousin [in Jamaica] lost her job but she also had some big financial problems, and was in serious debts to the point where she was on the verge of losing her home. I loaned her some money to get her back on her feet. But this backfired because it sort of became expected by her and my aunt [cousin's mother] that I would take care of her, and take on this responsibility of taking care of her family by sending her money every month … until it got to the point that she stopped looking for jobs and waited for my money to arrive to feed her and her children. It was affecting my health as I was feeling bitter and resentful that this burden was falling on me … so I just decided to stop sending it and it caused so much problems and bad feelings with the family on both sides [in Jamaica and the UK]. Because of that I decided I needed to distance myself from my family because they expect too much but give nothing back in return.'

We argue that the study of transnational families acts as a corrective to the long-held prominent viewpoint in British families studies literature that households structured around parent–child relationships or adult coupling, as well as issues of proximity and co-presence, represent important dimensions of intimacy in families. This contrasts with our analysis, which showed that for Caribbean and Italian migrant families, their understanding of a 'normative family' entailed them having extended kinship networks living in different countries and who they did not physically see for long periods of time. Studies focused on the transnational kinship networks of other migrant communities in Britain – such as for example Erel (2011) **[[missing reference]]** on Turkish families, Ryan (**[[year?]]**) **[[missing reference]]** on Polish families and Bedu-Addo (2010) **[[missing reference]]** on Ghanian families – support this claim. Our interviewees provided a wealth and range of everyday, routinised transnational family practices and rituals that individuals were engaged in to maintain family and intimate relationships. This included, for example:

- frequent care provision;
- financial remittance;
- 'return' migration;
- regular visits to their homeland.

Regular communication using various technologies (eg, mobile phone calls, texting, Skype and email) also featured heavily in their accounts. These very mundane, routinised activities that took place with family members living overseas represented for these individuals 'normative' features of everyday family experiences. These activities acted as a way to unite family members and sustain close emotional bonds across borders. We have written extensively about the mechanisms and processes that individual family members draw on to maintain such practices, and have looked in detail at specific transnational care practices, including care provision, financial and cultural remittance flows, and return migration (Reynolds, 2006b, 2010, 2011; Reynolds and Zontini, 2006, 2013b; Zontini and Reynolds, 2007; Zontini, 2008, 2010b; Madziva and Zontini, 2012).

Particularly relevant to our analysis are Bryceson and Vourela's (2002) concepts of 'frontiering' and 'relativising'. 'Frontiering' refers to 'the ways and means transnational

family members use to create familial space and network ties in a terrain where affinal connections are relatively sparse' (Bryceson and Vourela, 2002: 11). 'Relativising' refers to the ways 'individuals establish, maintain or curtail relational ties with specific family members' (Bryceson and Vourela, 2002: 14). Our analysis of Caribbean and Italian first-generation migrant families demonstrates 'frontiering' in practice. Individuals across these ethnically diverse communities established fictive kin relationships with people from the same ethnic groups in the UK. Our findings revealed how across both ethnic groups it was neighbours and friends who became aunts and uncles for the participant's children. These relationships were often formalised through special roles given at baptisms and weddings (Reynolds and Zontini, 2013b). In the Italian study, for instance, Giulia explained her kinship networks, and how her first-generation parents' friends became family following migration to Britain:

> 'My parents' generation, they have good strong friendships, which replicates a sense of family, given that we don't have any direct family here. They are really good to each other. They share things and make wine together and cook together and bring presents to each other when they visit. They have a strong sense of friendship being like family, and I think it was very important in giving them a sense of continuity and familiarity.'

The concept of 'relativising' actively demonstrates the resilience of family ties. Crucially, family rituals and celebrations, usually coinciding with cyclical festivities such as Christmas and Easter, and important life-cycle events such as weddings, funerals and anniversaries, also provided the opportunity for transnational links to develop. We have previously expanded on this issue elsewhere in our analysis of Caribbean and Italian transnational family relationships (Reynolds, 2006b; Zontini, 2010 **[[a or b** [illegible] Reynolds and Zontini, 2013a, 2013b). As our examination of Caribbean families illustrates, a whole industry has developed around the family reunion whereby kin members gather from across the globe. A principal aim of these family reunion events is to strengthen family ties and connections that could be potentially lost if family members do not make a concerted effort to maintain them (Sutton, 2004). In the following example, Michael, a second-generation migrant, described how the family reunion centred on Christmas and the family ritual of kin-members travelling to the grandparents' home in Jamaica, as a means of sustaining and reformulating kinship ties spread across geographical distance:

> 'I always make sure I go home [to Jamaica] for Christmas. Usually about five or six of my uncles and aunts go home also. It's a family tradition that we meet up at my grandparents' house in Kingston, and then travel down to my uncle house in MoBay [Montego bay] on Christmas Eve. Usually my uncle from Germany is there. Last Christmas my aunt from New Zealand came also who I had spoken to and seen photos of but had never met before. I promised I'd go and visit her over there, and I've promised to return the favour and invite her over to visit the English connection; she's never met many of her younger cousins who live here, so I see it as a way of expanding the family connections to the next generation ... also some of my dad's aunties from the States and three cousins and their kids who live in Canada came so it was rammed [crowded]. Our family 'get togethers' are

> important, it keep us emotionally close, it's a chance to catch up on family news, meet new and old family.... My grandparents have said when they die they're going to keep the house for us to use, a base for family to meet and keep returning to. I'm going to continue that tradition with my children.'

This account by Michael shows how he and his family members utilised these trips as an important social capital resource in maintaining inter/intragenerational and cross-cultural connections, and also as an opportunity to establish a bond with family members he had never met before, which meant a reformulation of his existing networks to bring in these new members. For Michael, the family trips to the homeland reinforced his ethnic and family ties to the region, signifying and locating the trips as a family practice invested with emotional meaning. This example of the family reunion and other family events and practices that take place across borders with family members living in different nation states highlights the interplay between (physical and emotional) proximity and distance a crucial element driving the motor of the transnational family experience. Different kinds and conceptualisations of intimacy come into play, which we highlight in the next section of our discussion.

Interrogating practices of intimacy and 'choice' across distance

British family studies literature conceptualises 'the family' as an affective space of intimacy (Smart, 2004)**[[missing reference]]** Sociological research in this area has tended to draw attention to embedded and relational attachments, reciprocity, multidirectional 'networks of intimacy' (Jamieson, 1998) and 'the *role of the family home in shaping interactions and practices of intimacy'* (Gabb, 2010: 66, emphasis **[[added or in original?]]** Much of the research in British family studies on intimate practices – whether it is in regard to individual self-fulfilment, the relationships between parents and children, and love and sexual relationships between adult partners/couples – foregrounds proximity and national-cultural contexts (Gabb and Silva, 2011). But what happens when, as is the norm with transnational families, intimate practices within families operate not on the basis of proximity but across distances? How do relationships that are understood as the norm take place outside of the confines of national borders and encompass different national-cultural contexts?

Certainly, relatively inexpensive flights and affordable travel have played their part in allowing families the opportunities to conduct intimate family practices across space, nations and time. In the Italian study, several participants would use cheap flights to visit family members for an extended weekend, or to seek medical and dental treatment back in Italy. While distance prevented those in the Caribbean study from travelling to their homeland as frequently, we were struck by the number of participants who would visit there two or three times a year, or would 'come and go' every six months in order to divide their time between family members living in the UK, Caribbean or other countries (most principally Canada and the US). We also observed many elderly retired Caribbean migrants who had returned back to the Caribbean booking appointments with the UK's National Health Service and welfare services that coincided with their bi-annual trips to see their children and grandchildren 'left behind' in the UK.

As we have also explored in depth elsewhere (Reynolds and Zontini, 2013b), advancements made in online technologies – such as Skype, instant messaging, social

networking sites and other internet and mobile phone-based platforms – have also transformed practices of intimacy across distance by allowing people to cross borders in new ways. Migrants with diasporic and transnational connections utilise a range of new media to maintain both 'real' and symbolic relationships within a particular locality (Horst, 2011; Madianou and Miller, 2012). As a number of studies also show, online technologies change transnational movements from the actual to the virtual, and shape how people imagine and belong to their home and host countries (Diminescu, 2008 **[[missing reference]]**; Miller, 2011; Anderson, 2013 **[[missing reference]]**

Of course, not every family member wants or has access to online technologies and this sometimes acts as a barrier to geographically dispersed family members staying connected. Such constraints on transnational family practices have encouraged us to question more generally the extent to which transnational families contest patterns of intimacy framed in British family studies as emerging out of democratisation, detraditionalisation and the individualisation of interpersonal relationships (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). It is argued that the 'transformation of intimacy' (Giddens, 1992) increases individual flexibility and choice, with individuals freed from familial ties of obligation and practices of family intimacy becoming more participatory and democratic (Beck-Gernsheim, 1999). Although there have been many critics of the detraditionalisation thesis for overstating the case (Smart and Shipman, 2004; Gross, 2005 **[[missing reference]]**; Smart, 2007), it still remains the dominant overarching narrative of family life in recent time

In one sense, research on transnational families contributes to this discourse by championing Bryceson and Vourela's (2002) concept of 'frontiering', which emphasises the idea that people are actively creating their families to reinforce notions of belonging and affinity. In the previous section, for instance, and in related studies we commented on how first-generation migrants create new families in the new country comprised of friends and fictive kin usually sharing the same ethnic, cultural or regional background (Reynolds and Zontini, 2013b). That being said, however, we also believe that the ideas of democratisation and detraditionalisation in interpersonal relationships disguise key structural and cultural processes that underpin transnational family life.

Research evidence suggests that structural inequalities associated with gender, race and social class, for example, govern family migration practices in Britain and also determine how these families operate within the jurisdictional context of the nation state (Kofman, 2004). **[[missing reference]]** Under the current neoliberal political agenda, we are witnessing a backlash against migrant families as sites of multiculturalism. Within education and social welfare policy debates, for example, there is a prevailing discourse that low-educated migrants become mothers, reproduce social inequalities and the 'wrong' type of social capital, and as a result there is an increasing demonisation of their cultural and family practices (Erel, 2012). Current policies, supported by the media, promote the viewpoint that family migration is 'out of control' and therefore in need of intervention. Indeed as Kofman (2012) argues, a long-term objective of policies setting out to increase the immigration control of non-non-European Union (EU) (and Global South) migrants could ultimately be to disrupt and curtail their transnational family relationships and practices.

This interplay between structure and agency demonstrates that individuals' choices, decisions and practices are influenced and constrained by intersecting relational, social/cultural, material and institutional factors (Duncan et al, 2011). **[[missing reference ~ or do you mean Duncan, 2011, as stated in the References?]]**

The tightening of immigration laws – through immigration restrictions on pre-entry tests, visa restrictions on non-EU citizens and proposed increases to the sponsorship and income requirement threshold – directly inform whether non-EU migrant couples and families live together or apart. Sixty-one per cent of non-EU migrant women will not be able to match the income requirement compared with one third of men, and the income threshold favours professional elites and skilled migrants, clearly demonstrating the inherent gender and social class inequalities built into the system (Migrants Right Network, 2013). [[missing reference]]

Transnational family practices are becoming increasingly complex in the face of such stringent immigration legislation. They will, for example, be further determined, regulated and enforced by institutional and government legislation rather than simply being a result of familial 'choice' and decision making. As mentioned above, some migrant groups from the Global South will be subjected to increased legislation that will curtail transnational family practices. For Caribbean migrants, for example, this will mean restriction in family reunification and visits by family members coming from this region in order to provide family care. In contrast, migrants from the Global North territories (eg, Australia, Canada and the US) and the EU will continue to traverse borders and nations with greater ease and frequency. Under the current global economic crisis, however, some EU migrants are also feeling more vulnerable about their ability to traverse national borders. For example, due to recent discussions initiated by Prime Minister David Cameron about limiting EU citizens' freedom of movement, Italian migrants, who until recently felt secure of their European citizenship rights, now realise that their rights could be curtailed and their privileges removed (Reynolds and Zontini, 2013a).

Conclusion

In this article we have attempted to show how transnational families should occupy a more central focus in British family studies rather than existing as a marginal and separated field of enquiry within migration studies. British family studies have long since recognised family diversity, change and boundary-crossing in everyday lives. Transnational families contribute significantly to this debate by encouraging a rethinking of family practices in relation to and beyond the boundaries of the nation state. We drew on examples of two groups that are culturally and ethnically distinct from one another – Caribbeans and Italians – to show how transnational family practices take place in everyday family interactions among a range of groups settled in Britain. Through our examples we raise important ideological questions about what it means to be a family in contemporary Britain. Specifically, these examples allow us to rethink the cultural specificity that underpins constructions and understandings of the idealised (but often contested) 'normative family' in British family studies, moving them beyond methodological nationalism.

Fundamentally, through our focus on transnational families, we challenge the underlying assumption of British family studies that see proximity, co-presence and households structured around parent–child relationships or adult couple relationships as representing 'normative' features of family and intimate life. Our analysis shows that for transnational migrant communities, a 'normative family' entails having family members living in different countries that they may not physically see for long periods of time. The very mundane, routinised activities taking place with family members

living overseas – for example daily phone calls, Skype calls and family remittances – represent for them 'doing family' in everyday life and across distances.

We also want to bring attention to the interplay between agency and structure, and to the fact that families, and in particular transnational families, operate within the jurisdictional context of the nation state. This raises questions about the extent to which individuals in contemporary Britain are afforded greater 'choice', flexibility and freedom in defining their family lives. Our analysis identifies how immigration legislation confines and restricts practices of care and intimacy among transnational families. Particularly among Caribbeans in the UK with non-EU family members from this Global South region, stringent immigration legislation is increasingly curtailing some aspects of cross-border family practices. It could be argued that a long-term objective of increased immigration control of non-EU (and Global South) migrants is to disrupt their transnational family relationships and practices. In addressing some of these complex issues surrounding transnational families, the one thing that clearly emerges is the resilience of family ties. In spite of these increased difficulties, our research has shown that rather than fragmenting or disintegrating as a result of migration, family relationships simply transform and are reconstituted in new forms. Given migrant communities' growing presence in Britain as well as their theoretical significance for reframing current debates, we argue for the study of transnational families to be brought from the margins into the centre of British family studies.

Notes

[1] The research forms part of the Families and Social Capital ESRC Research Group programme of work (ESRC award reference: M570255001).

[2] This diversity in family patterns also reflects the fact that individuals and families have had to culturally adapt themselves as a result of enforced and then subsequent waves of voluntary migration (Smith, 1996 **[[missing reference]]**; Goulbourne, 2002 **[[missing reference]]**; authors blinded for review, 2005 **[[what reference should be cited here?]]**).

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