

**The transnational family: migration, family and rituals  
among Brazilian migrant women in the UK**

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I confirm that the work submitted in this thesis is my own and that the thesis presented is the one on which I expect to be examined.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>1</sup> Translation: ‘Brazilian Migration to the UK Research Group’

<sup>2</sup> Translation: ‘Support for Brazilian Women Abroad’

<sup>3</sup> Translation: ‘Brazilian International Migration Observatory’

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores how Brazilian migrant women ‘do family’ with their family members in Brazil. Of particular importance is their practice of family rituals and the giving of ritualist features to family practices to create and recreate a sense of familyhood, even while living at a distance for an extended period of time. The thesis dialogues with transnational family studies that consider the significance and continuity of family relationships in the process of migration. I investigate this in relation to and through the perspective of Brazilian women in London where, despite being populous, they remain a largely understudied migrant group. My investigation is framed by a qualitative methodological framework that includes a multi-sited ethnography at participant houses, biographical interviews and diaries. Fieldwork was carried out in the UK and in Brazil over 21 months, including thirty biographical interviews at the participants’ houses in both locations, and seven daily diaries, reporting the Brazilian women migrants’ daily interaction with their family members in Brazil. My analysis considers the process of ritualization of family life and the creation and recreation of family (in daily, weekly, monthly or annual events, or during the life-course) through communication technologies (letters, telephone, video communication) and visits that constitute the conditions of mediation for families living far apart. I show that ritualizing as a family involves a set of activities heavily encoded with symbolic and affective meanings as well as some constraints which can influence the capacity and opportunity to practise them. I conclude that the process of ritualization of family practices done by the Brazilian transnational families in this study was especially important for them, in order to (re)constitute their sense of familyhood at a distance.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

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Claudia moved to London in 1986. She was a young single woman in her twenties, who in Brazil had a job as a bilingual secretary in São Paulo. She moved to London for a temporary period, '*one-year maximum*', she said. Claudia narrated that she migrated to work as an *au pair* to save some money, improve her English skills and return to Brazil in search of better job opportunities. However, as she explains, '*one course led to another and one job to another, and each time one more year had passed*'. Claudia has now been in London for 30 years and still has doubts about whether or not to return to Brazil. She explains that such doubts are strictly connected with her family – her mother, brother, nephews and nieces, who live in Brazil. In her story, she continually recalls and explains about her links with her family members in Brazil throughout the 30 years she has lived in the UK. She affirms that she has kept her family ties 'alive' along her migration journey, and it has been an essential part of her life in the UK. Claudia's story echoes many other stories of Brazilian migrant women who migrated to London in the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s.

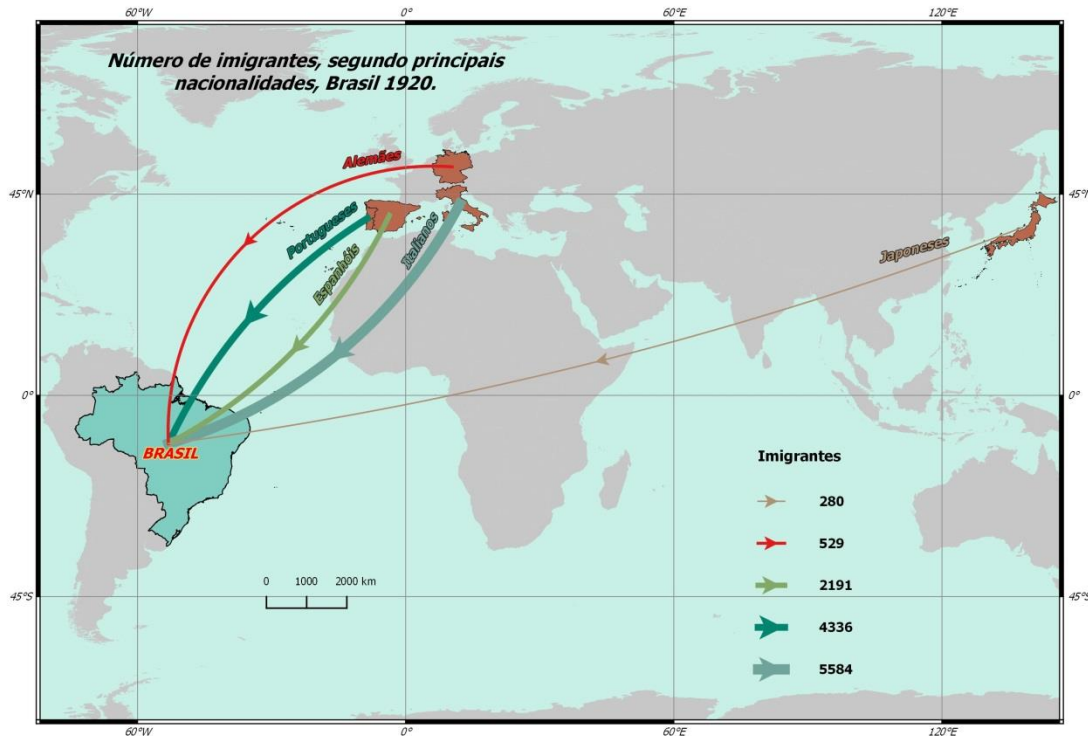
Based on the narratives of some Brazilian migrant women who migrated to the UK, particularly to London, in these periods, and the stories of their family members in Brazil, this thesis explores how these Brazilians have 'done family' and how they have kept their sense of familyhood over the long period of living geographically distant. In order to address these points, I have drawn on transnational family studies, which have interfaces with the broader debates on migration and family scholarships. This thesis, therefore, aims to contribute to these transnational family debates largely through empirical analysis of how Brazilian migrant women 'do family' with their family members in Brazil. The process of ritualization of family life is mentioned by the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil as being important in their construction of a sense of familyhood at a distance. Thus, based on my empirical analysis, this study intends to show how the group studied here ritualize some of their family practices to create and recreate their sense of familyhood.

In this introduction chapter, I first approach some aspects of Brazilian migration, with an overview, and then give special attention to Brazilian migration in the UK. In addition, I highlight the importance of family to Brazilians, especially Brazilian women. Finally, I describe the objectives and structure of the thesis.

## **1. Framing Brazilian migration**

Brazilian emigration started in vast numbers in the second half of the 1980s, and represented a complete reversal of Brazil's demographic image of a country that had been a major recipient of a diverse migrant population (Patarra, 2005; Sales, 1991, 2000; McIlwaine, 2011b). The period between 1874 and 1930 showed the greatest levels of immigration to Brazil. This intense migration was the result of various factors in Europe and Brazil. In Europe, the expansion of capitalism, the mechanization of agricultural activities, population pressure on the demographic transition and low shipping costs, and in Brazil, the need for free labour and the idea of a racial civilizing project that proclaimed a desire to 'whiten' the Brazilian population were among the important features of the immigration into Brazil (Seyferth, 1986; Solé et al., 2011). At that time, according to Levy (1974), about 4.07 million migrants entered the country, invited by the Brazilian government who subsidized their passage. They were mostly Italians, Portuguese, Spaniards and Germans, and later, Japanese, who also became an important migrant group. These migrants were an essential labour force for the coffee and cotton plantations and for the industrialization of the country, mainly in São Paulo and the southern states of Brazil (Paraná, Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul) (Solé et al., 2011). The map below illustrates the pattern of immigration to Brazil at the beginning of the twentieth century.

**Figure 1.1 Immigrant flow into Brazil in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century**



Source: Oliveira et al. (forthcoming).

However, from the 1930s, and especially post-World War II, the arrival of immigrants reduced dramatically, not only for Brazil, but for all South American countries. Unlike many other countries which had strong emigration to northern countries such as the United States and Europe to meet the standard requirements of Fordist reproduction of capital in full expansion in these areas, notably through the *Bracero* programme in the US and Guest workers in Europe (e.g. Germany, Switzerland, France and so on), Brazil contained migration almost entirely within its own borders (Sales, 2000). Due to the profound regional inequalities within Brazil, migration occurred from the poorest northern areas to the richest industrialized states in the south and southeast, particularly São Paulo, and from rural areas into the cities (Solé et al., 2011; Piscitelli, 2008). Although there are data on the entry of approximately 1.1 million migrants into the country between 1940 and the late 1970s (Levy, 1974), this figure is considered by demographers to be very low, and consequently this historical period has been characterized by the country's minimal participation in international migration, given the small volumes of both arrivals and departures (Patarra and Baeninger, 1995; Oliveira, 2013).

This scenario began to change, albeit slowly, in the 1970s, when many of those opposed to the military dictatorship (which lasted from 1964 to 1985) went to live abroad, usually in exile (e.g. the famous Brazilian musicians Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil in the UK). Going

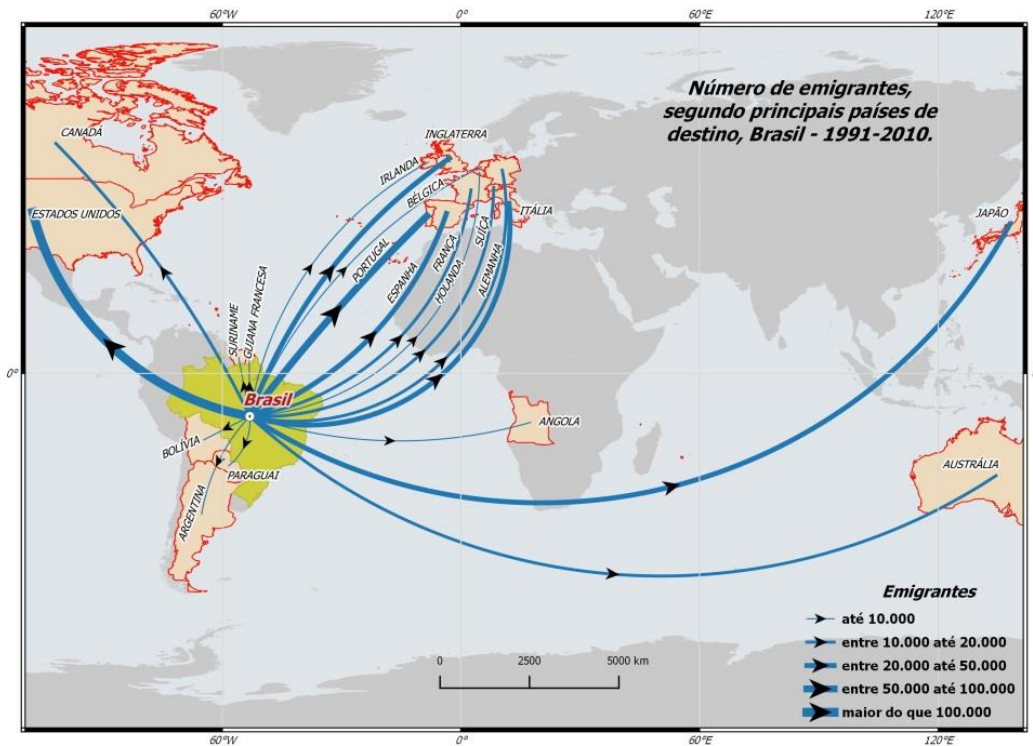
abroad during the dictatorship period was seen as a suspicious activity. One of the participants of this research, for example, explained to me that, in the 1970s and early 1980s, in order to leave the country a traveller had to ask permission of the Brazilian government authorities. The reasons for the trip had to be fully explained and a deposit fee paid. The money could only be withdrawn once the person had gone back to Brazil. Thus, this did not represent a significant migration as most of the exiles returned to Brazil when the dictatorship ended (Sales, 1991; 2000). But towards the late 1980s Brazilians' migration abroad gradually increased, and there is a general consensus in the literature on Brazilian migration that the first massive wave of emigration happened from the mid-1980s to the 1990s (Patarras, 2005; Sales, 1991, 2000; Margolis, 1994, 1998, 2013; Piscitelli, 2008; Solé et al., 2011; Padilla, 2006; Oliveira, 2013).

As suggested by Sales (2000), the numbers clearly indicate and confirm this trend. Carvalho (1996) has estimated that there was negative net migration in the 1980s of approximately 1.5 million Brazilians, who mainly went to the US. This represents the departure of almost 1 per cent of the country's total population (Sales, 2000). In the 1990s, the balance remained negative, and the Brazilian migration became more diverse, reaching countries besides the United States, such as Japan and European countries (Margolis, 2013; Tsuda, 2003; McIlwaine et al., 2011a, b). The Brazilian official statistics institute confirms that between 1991 and 2010, 23.8 per cent of Brazilian migration was to the US (IBGE<sup>4</sup>, 2010). This country was the main destination for Latin Americans up to the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001 (McIlwaine, 2011a). The other main Brazilian destinations were Portugal with 13.4 per cent, 9.4 per cent to Spain, 7.4 per cent to Japan, 7 per cent to Italy and 6.2 per cent to the UK. IBGE's survey also provides information on age, gender and the Brazilian states where the most people migrated from. Regarding gender, 54 per cent were women and 46 per cent men, and they were between 20 and 39 years old, mainly from the states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais (see Figures 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4).

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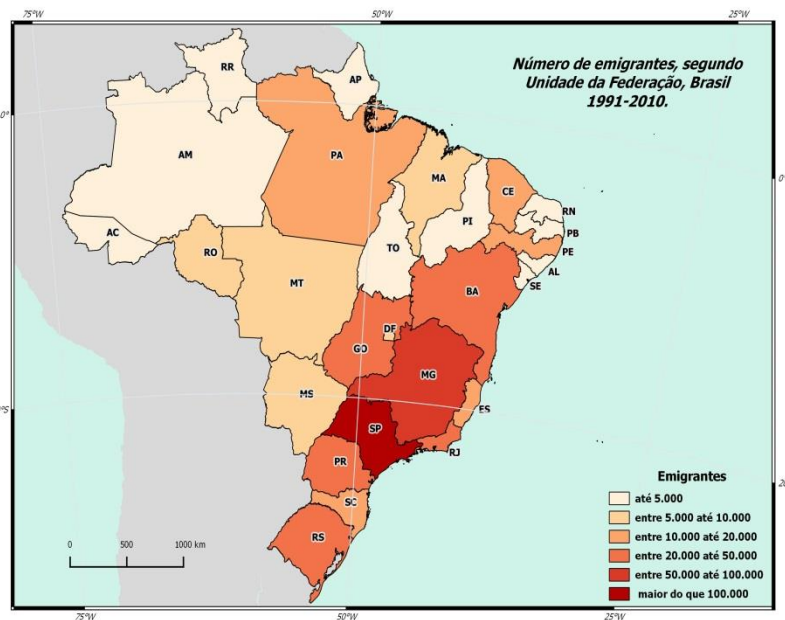
<sup>4</sup> Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. Translation: 'Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics'.

**Figure 1.2: Brazilian emigration flow between 1991 and 2010**



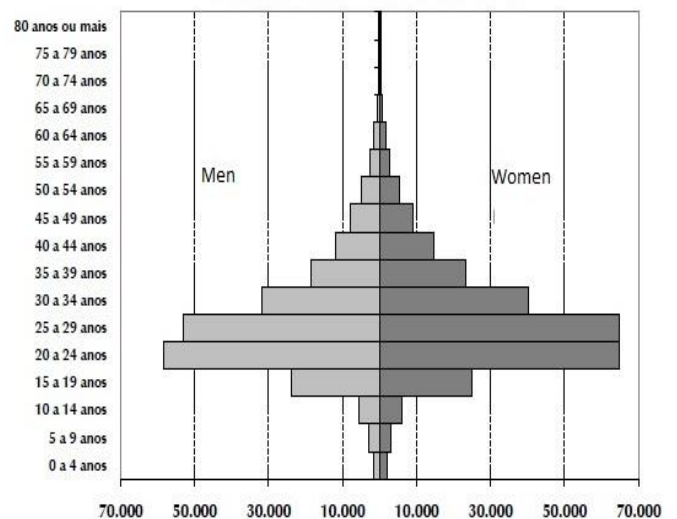
Source: Oliveira et al. (forthcoming)

**Figure 1.3: Brazilian migrants by state of origin between 1991 and 2010**



Source: Oliveira (2013).

**Figure 1.4: Brazilian migrants by age and gender between 1991 and 2010**



Source: Oliveira (2013).

By the mid-1990s onwards, Brazilian emigration had become an important issue for the media and academics. According to Sales (1994) news of Brazilians being prevented from

entering the US and, later, European countries emerged as one of the main images of Brazilians abroad. The main topics discussed by the national media tend to be: the living and working conditions of the Brazilian population abroad; remittances of Brazilian migrants; the detention, imprisonment and deportation of Brazilians; documentation problems of crossing borders; Brazilian involvement in human trafficking, and sexual exploitation or prostitution (Povoa Neto, 2006). While the national media focus their attention on topics that produce ‘good’ headlines, it still remains to be understood why Brazilian migration began in the mid-1980s and continued into the 1990s and 2000s, and why Brazilians migrate to particular countries such as the US, Japan and certain European countries. These inquiries have become the focus of several academic studies.

The pioneer studies of Sales (1991; 1992), Goza (1992) and Margolis (1998), which focus on explaining the Brazilian migration to the US, give particular importance to the Brazilian economic and political crisis context. They argue that the 1980s and 1990s were very decisive decades in the transformation of Brazilian society. Up to the mid-1980s, through a national policy known as ‘autonomy by distance’ (Vigevani et al., 2003), the Brazilian government, ruled by the military (1964-84), tried to protect the national economy by isolating its market as well as its population from the international scenario. The Brazilian economy was very much centred on exporting natural resources as well as agricultural production, while the internal market was supplied by national industries, which were mainly outdated and protected by the government. In addition, most of the international investment made in Brazil was provided by credits and loans from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). This economic picture produced what scholars call an Economic Miracle bubble. Overall, it was a closed national economy very much dependent on both Brazilian government investment and financial international organizations.

However, due to the two oil crises – in 1973 and 1979 – and the Mexican financial crisis in 1982, most of the Latin American countries, including Brazil, which lacked sturdy mechanisms for controlling capital movements, faced a rapid decline in their industrial production, and consequently their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) dramatically shrank (Bertola and Ocampo, 2012). This decade is known as the ‘Lost Decade’<sup>5</sup> among the Latin American countries (see McIlwaine, 2012). According to Bertola and Ocampo (2012:9) the

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<sup>5</sup> This term was coined by important Latin-American scholars who took part in CEPAL – United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (Rodriguez et al., 1995)

‘[...] differing sizes of the various countries’ external and fiscal deficits and the differing degrees of their financial systems’ fragility played a crucial role in determining the relative impact of the 1980s debt crisis’. As a result of these economic crises, Brazilian inflation rose in the last two years of the 1980s showing ‘the highest levels of inflation rates: 685% in 1988, and 1320% in 1989’ (Sales, 2000:154), and the external debts peaked to 100 billion dollars, which forced the national government to borrow money from the IMF and afterwards declare a moratoria decree which isolated the country from modernizing many important sectors such as communications, transport, education, health and infrastructure (Cardoso, 2006).

In addition to the rampant levels of inflation and the low salaries in Brazil, as argued by Sales (2000) the Brazilian emigration to the US can also be explained by the political disillusionment with the rise and fall of several governmental economic rescue plans. Sales refers to the late 1980s as the ‘triennium of disillusionment’, as it was a time when the hopes and expectations that had come with the return of democracy were soon dispelled by the economic recession, unemployment and inflation. Among several failed economic plans and political disillusionment, the disastrous presidency of Fernando Collor de Melo (1990-1992) deepened the sense of disappointment, and led the Brazilian middle class into stagnation, impoverishment and a lack of perspective on social mobility (Patarra, 2005; Sales, 2000). Thus, the literature on Brazilian migration to the US specifically demonstrates that the initial Brazilian movers were mainly white, from lower and middle-class backgrounds, and young, from urban areas of Brazil, usually with a high education level, and usually working in a low-wage service sector in the US (Margolis, 1994; 1998).

Certainly the impact of the various economic and political crises that were widespread among the Latin American countries in general, and Brazil in particular, encouraged Brazilians to leave the country (see McIlwaine et al., 2011a). Some of the participants of this research mentioned these factors as being relevant to their decision to migrate, as some were working in low-paid jobs or were unemployed in Brazil, before moving to the UK, and they related their labour conditions to the difficult time the country was going through by the late 1980s and 1990s. However, these explanations are overly based on macro-economic and political, neo-classical ‘*push-pull*’ theories<sup>6</sup>. Despite the economic and political factors there were other reasons to explain the Brazilian emigration. In the case of the US, for example, scholars have found that the North American cultural imperialism, which intensively penetrated Brazilian

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<sup>6</sup> See Massey et al. (1993); Castles, de Haas and Miller (2014); and Arango (2000) for an overview on migration theories.

society, through movies, music, and technologies, widely promoted the American lifestyle, and the seductive ideology of the American dream played a significant part in the Brazilian migration to the US (Beserra, 2003). According to Margolis (2013), there is in Brazil a prevalent ideology that all that is ‘modern’ is located abroad, in the US or in Western Europe countries. She argues that Brazilians seem to think that achieving ‘modernity’ can be done by moving to a ‘developed’ country, and moving away from everything that is identified with Brazil (Margolis, 2013; Martes, 2010).

Besides those macro-structural factors, Sales (2000) suggests that the impact of momentary political-economic crises and even the promotion of the American lifestyle affected the Brazilian population on different levels; however, only some people are going to take the decision to migrate, thus there must be something else to trigger the Brazilian migration in the 1980s and 1990s. She states ‘in the genesis of migratory flows, there are always fortuitous, random and pioneering factors related to the migrations’ (Sales, 2000:155). Sales, then, focuses her attention on meso-levels and considers the importance of social networks to the beginning of the migration process. This was clear in the case of Governador Valadares, which was a city in Minas Gerais state where a high proportion of its population migrated to the US. Studies showed connections of this city to the US during World War II, where American engineers worked in mineral mining. When they left for the US, they invited their domestic workers, and it was the beginning of a significant stream of Brazilian migrants from this particular location to the US, which later involved the arrival of family members and friends (Margolis, 1998; Goza, 2004; and Siqueira, 2003).

Regarding two other important Brazilian migration destinations, Portugal and Japan, many theories have emerged about the reasons Brazilians migrated to these countries. The most prominent ones explain Brazilian migration as a returning or counter-current migration, as well as emphasizing the network of interpersonal connections (Padilla, 2009). In the case of Portugal, the linguistic, cultural colonial legacies and networks of family and friends have been considered as the key explanations for the large number of Brazilians there (see Padilla, 2006; Peixoto, 2009; Margolis, 2013). The first wave of Brazilians to Portugal was in the 1990s, comprising middle-class professionals (dentists, engineers, architects and advertising executives, among others) and the second wave was in the later 1990s and 2000s, with the arrival of Brazilians from the lower middle-class (Malheiros, 2007) – a phenomenon which Padilla (2006) describes as the ‘proletarianization’ of Brazilian migration. Regarding the Brazilian migration to Japan, it was described as a ‘returning’ migration of the *nikkeijin*, descendants of those who migrated from Japan to Brazil in the early years of the twentieth century. Brazilians



in Japan became more visible in the 1990s, when the Japanese government revised and changed their restrictive policies towards low-skilled migrant workers, allowing the legal entry of *dekasegi*<sup>7</sup> (temporary migrant workers) into the country. Along with the first *dekasegi* went their family members and friends (see Tsuda, 2003).

Indeed, in order to understand the intense and prolific emigration of Brazilians, scholars have combined macro-structural economic, political and cultural factors and examined the meso and micro-levels factors, such as network connection of places and/or interpersonal connections of families and friends. The Brazilian migration to the UK, which gradually increased from the 1990s onwards has also been explained by some of the factors highlighted above (see Torresan, 1994; Cwerner, 2001; McIlwaine et al., 2011a, b; Evans et al., 2007). In the next section, I frame the Brazilian migration to the UK.

## 2. Framing Brazilians in the UK

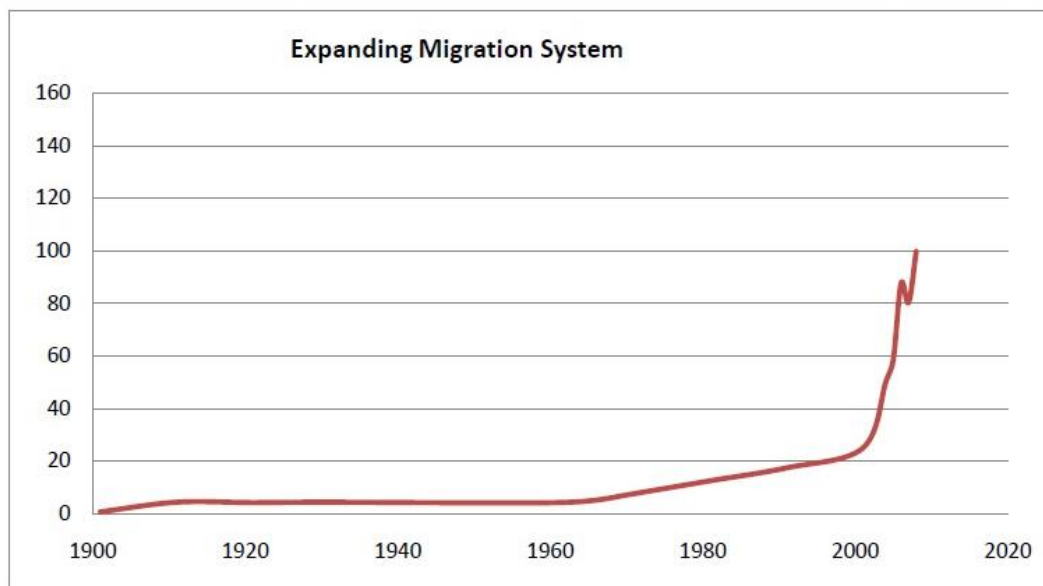
Brazilians in the UK have been classed as one of the groups that make up the so-called ‘new’ migrants and they are considered as part of the phenomenon of ‘super-diversity’ in the UK, which intensified from the 1990s onwards (Vertovec, 2007; Evans et al., 2007). Vertovec as well as McIlwaine et al. (2011 a, b) and Bailey and Giralt (2011) argue that over the past 30 years most of the discourse, policy and public understanding of migration in the UK has been based on the experiences of people who arrived between the 1950s and 1970s from Jamaica, Trinidad, Guyana and other places in the West Indies along with those from India, Pakistan and what is now Bangladesh. These migrant groups attracted attention as they were from former British colonies. However, Vertovec (2007) states that after the 1990s the nature of migration to the UK changed and brought with it a transformative diversification. Such diversity is not just in terms of bringing more ethnicities and countries of origin, but also with respect to a multiplication of significant variables such as:

[...] differential immigration statuses and their concomitant entitlements and restrictions of rights, divergent labour market experiences, discrete gender and age profiles, patterns of spatial distribution, and mixed local area responses by service providers and residents (Vertovec, 2007:1025).

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In this sense, he states that new, smaller, less organized, legally differentiated, non-citizen migrant groups with no specific historical links with Britain have gained hardly any attention or a place in the public agenda and academic fields (Vertovec, 2007). Indeed, McIlwaine et al. (2011a, b) state that Latin Americans in general, and Brazilians in particular, have been crucial to London's economy and society, but their experiences have been neglected and ignored despite their major contributions and presence in the city. In the case of Brazilians, this group gained some media and academic attention after 2005 when Jean Charles de Menezes, a young Brazilian man who had been living in the UK for 3 years, was shot dead by London Metropolitan police officers at Stockwell underground station in south London when he was mistaken for a suicide bomber (Evans et al., 2007). This tragic event made headlines around the world, and brought the Brazilian migration to the UK, and more specifically to London, to the forefront of the news for a while.

The numbers clearly indicate a trend of a gradual increase of Brazilians in the UK since the late 1980s, which intensified during the 1990s, especially during the 2000s onwards (see Figure 1.5). Kubal et al. (2011:9) note that in the late 1960s and early 1970s there were very few Brazilians in London, and they were mainly political asylum seekers who had fled Brazil during its dictatorship regime and who later returned to Brazil. The increase started in the 1990s, and the deep Brazilian economic and political crisis (as mentioned above) was considered as one of the main reasons, while later in the 2000s the increase was linked to the change in US immigration policy after 9/11 (see McIlwaine, 2011a; Dias, 2015). More recently, from 2008 onwards, according to McIlwaine and Bunge (2016), the number of Latin Americans in London, particularly Brazilians, has increased as a consequence of secondary migration from European Union (EU) countries, especially Spain. For these scholars, this phenomenon grew substantially after the 2008 global economic recession that particularly affected the southern European nations, and as a result of the UK, particularly London, having faced a shorter economic downturn in comparison with the southern European countries, with a continuing demand for labour. Another factor highlighted by the scholars for the increase of Latin Americans in London was the EU freedom of movement. By living in a southern European nation, some Latin Americans, such as Brazilians, were able to regularize their immigration status and become EU citizens, which allowed them freedom of movement around the EU to search for jobs. This tendency may be affected in the near future with the UK vote last year (2016) to leave the European Union.

**Figure 1.5: Brazilians in the UK**

Source: Kubal et al. (2011)

Analysts of Brazilian affairs in the UK tend to agree that the available official data about Brazilians in the UK are woefully inaccurate, but it still helps to get a sense of the increase of this group and the importance of studying their lived experiences (Evans et al., 2007; Evans et al., 2011a; McIlwaine et al., 2011a, b; McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016). The British Census of 2001 enumerated just over 8,000 Brazilians in London, and official estimates at that time indicated that they might number anything from 15,000 in England and Wales (UKNS, 2001) while unofficial estimates put the Brazilian population at around 50,000 (Cwerner, 2001). In 2005, the Greater London Authority published a report based on the 2001 Census which indicated that 58.6 per cent of the 8,000 Brazilians were women and 7.1 per cent were under 16, with 90 per cent aged 16-64, and 2.3 per cent over 65 years old (UKNS, 2005). The last Census of 2011 enumerated 50,570 Brazilians in England and Wales with 31,357 in London. Brazilians were the largest Latin American group, followed by Colombians, with 63 per cent of Brazilians living in London. There were more Latin American women than men living in London and on average they were aged under 40 (McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016). According to the Brazilian Census 2010, the estimate of Brazilians living in the UK was 30,457 (6.2 per cent of the total Brazilians living abroad). According to the most recent data from the Brazilian Ministry of External Relations (MRE, 2014) based on services provided by the Brazilian Consulate and non-governmental organizations, there are approximately 120,000 Brazilians in the UK.

The discrepancy between the official figures based on British and Brazilian census reports and the MRE's estimates has been observed in previous studies of Brazilians in the US (Margolis, 1998) and also in the UK (Cwerner, 2001), and has been explained in various ways. First, the British migration authorities have no effective means of tracking people down once they have entered the country, or recording their exit, except in cases of deportation. In addition, most Brazilians will be constrained by the time limits indicated on their visa, although many will overstay. Third, many Brazilians pursue dual citizenship and when filling in the form they mention their European nationality; and finally, many Brazilians see their stay in the UK as temporary only or are unwilling to make themselves known to the British authorities and therefore do not complete the British Census (Evans et al., 2011a). Regarding the Brazilian statistics, the most trustworthy data source is the IBGE Census 2010, but according to scholars, due to its methodology which asks in the country if someone from the household is living abroad, it has underestimated the number of Brazilians abroad, and the data from the Exterior Ministry are very random, with no clear methodology (Oliveira, 2013).

Studies looking at Brazilians in the UK, from the 1990s, have shown that this group are largely concentrated in London, and come mostly from lower to middle-class backgrounds, from larger cities, especially from the southeast, south, and more recently also from the mid-west of Brazil (Torresan, 1994, 1995; Cwerner, 2001; Evans et al., 2007; Evans et al., 2011a; McIlwaine et al., 2011 a, b; McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016; Sheringham, 2010; Martins Jr and Dias, 2013). In the 1990s the Brazilians in London were mainly in their twenties or thirties, single and were highly educated (Torresan, 1994, 1995; Cwerner, 2001). Unlike the Brazilian professional middle-class in Portugal, where their Brazilian middle-class status was recognized both in Brazil and in Portugal, and they were a visible labour force (Padilla, 2006; 2009); in London, Brazilians in the 1990s and 2000s were seen as part of an 'undifferentiated mass of immigrants from Latin America, just as they are in the United States' (Margolis, 2013:107). Brazilians in London, despite their middle-class background and high education levels, are mostly employed in elementary low-paid jobs (Evans et al., 2011a; 2015). In addition, Torresan (1995; 2012) and Cwerner (2001) argue that in the 1990s young Brazilians usually arrived in the country as students or tourists and sought work, and although the British authorities did not welcome them with open arms, they looked the other way, as it was considered a docile labour force that could be easily controlled and which they believed to be temporary. However, as Brazilian numbers started to increase, and the temporariness of Brazilians slowly became a more permanent migration, the British authorities got stricter, particularly after 9/11 (Margolis,

2013; Evans, 2010; Kubal et al., 2011; McIlwaine, 2011 a, b; Dias, 2015; Martins Jr and Dias, 2013).

The rise of the Brazilian population created Brazilian places in the city of London. Indeed, restaurants, bars, travel services, beauty salons, religious places, magazines and newspapers and community help centres<sup>8</sup> became part of the London scene compounding its diverse landscape, as Frangella (2010) argues. This caught the attention of scholars, who have slowly tried to better understand this migrant group. Evans et al. (2007), for example, wrote the first report on Brazilians in London for the Strangers into Citizens campaign organized by Queen Mary College, which aimed to call attention to the Latin Americans in London (McIlwaine et al., 2011a). In addition, the topic of young undocumented Brazilian migration in London has been tackled by Bloch et al. (2009), and the topics of language and identity (Souza, 2010a; 2010b), housing (Dias, 2010), ethnic food and culinary culture (Brightwell, 2010; 2012), religion (Sheringham, 2009; 2011) as well as jobs, consumer experiences, identity and border crossing tactics have emerged (Martins Jr and Dias, 2013; Dias, 2015; Martins Jr, 2017).

In order to give visibility to the Brazilian community in the UK, some researchers, including myself – from both academic and professional realms – set up a research group called GEB<sup>9</sup> (Grupo de Estudos sobre Brasileiros no Reino Unido). It was founded in 2008 with the aim of furthering the study of the UK's increasingly significant Brazilian migration. As a result of tremendous efforts by this group, in 2010 a dossier was edited about Brazilians in London which was published in a Brazilian Journal – *Travessia* (Dias and Tonhati, 2010). In 2011, this group wrote a report called *For a better life: Brazilians in London* (Evans et al., 2011a), which was the result of a quantitative survey that included 553 participants. More recently, in 2013, through an exploratory study using an online survey, this group published a report on Brazilian women migrants, based on information from 365 questionnaires (Evans et al., 2013). Recently in 2015, the same group launched a new report called *Diversity of opportunities: Brazilians in the UK*. To date, it is the biggest survey about Brazilians produced outside of Brazil, with 700 participants (Evans et al., 2015). Moreover, the interest in Brazilians has gone beyond Brazilian researchers. For example, in 2010 the University of Oxford conducted a research project named

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<sup>8</sup> Casa do Brasil em Londres - <http://casadobrasil.org.uk/home> and ABRAS (Association for Brazilians in the UK) - [www.abras.org.uk/](http://www.abras.org.uk/)

<sup>9</sup> Translation: 'Brazilian Migration to the UK Research Group' - <https://geblondon.wordpress.com/>

THEMIS<sup>10</sup>, in which I participated as a researcher. They chose a few migrant groups to compare their patterns of migration to Europe – Moroccans, Ukrainians and Brazilians (Kubal et al., 2011). More recently, as mentioned, Queen Mary College launched a new report on Latin American migrants called *Towards Visibility: the Latin American community in London*, which brought fresh data on Brazilians in London (McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016).

In fact, as these various studies show, Brazilians in the UK, or more particularly in London, are a diverse migrant group, and an accurate demographic profile of Brazilians is extremely difficult to produce. Although the statistics about the Brazilian population in the UK are contradictory, or cannot be considered as representative of the entire population, they do not prevent some trends being observed (Kubal et al., 2011; Evans et al., 2007, 2011a, 2013, 2015). One notable trend is the large numbers of Brazilian women. The British and Brazilian official census data reveal that the total number of Brazilian women has been continuously larger than the number of men. Kubal et al. (2011), for example, showed that the 2001 Census reported significant female migration from Brazil to the UK (61 per cent women and 39 per cent men). The surveys of Evans et al. (2011a; 2015) also reveal a larger proportion of women – 61 per cent women, 39 per cent men; and 65 per cent women, 35 per cent men, respectively. It may only mean that Brazilian women are more willing to take part in the surveys, but other numbers and studies have shown qualitatively the large presence of Brazilian women in migration in general, and specifically to the UK (Assis, 2014; Evans et al., 2013; Souza, 2015). While the number of Brazilian women reported in the UK varies, for the reasons noted above, there is a clear trend that the numbers of Brazilian women are larger than those of men in the UK, yet their experiences have been understudied.

The literature on Brazilian migrant women has mainly focused its attention on destination countries such as the US and Portugal (Assis, 2007, 2014; McDonnell and Lourenco, 2008; Padilla, 2007; Padilla and Gomes, 2012). There are no well-known substantial studies that have focused particularly on their experiences in the UK (Evans et al., 2013). In trying to partially fill this gap, I decided to give special attention to Brazilian women in the UK and their transnational relationships with their family members in Brazil, as it was reported by them as a relevant part of their lives in the UK. Although this research takes particular women's profiles (see Chapter 3), it is worth highlighting some general features of Brazilian women

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<sup>10</sup> THEMIS Project (Theorizing the Evolution of European Migration Systems, International Migration Institute) - <https://www.imi.ox.ac.uk/completed-projects/themis>

migrants in the UK, using the most recent information available (McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016; Evans et al., 2013, 2015), as they illuminate some of the discussion of this research.

### 3. Framing Brazilian women in the UK

The literature about Brazilian migrant women has largely developed around this migrant group in Portugal and the US, although there have also been a few studies on Brazilian women in Italy (Piscitelli, 2008; Piscitelli et al., 2011) and Spain (Solé et al., 2011; Parella, 2011; Badet, 2011). It is a common theme in the literature about Brazilian women that they have engaged more and more in migration. Starting from the late 1980s, it increased gradually during the 1990s and more exponentially since 2000. But the Brazilian women's motivations for migrating vary, with a range of factors and academic explanations (see Torresan, 1995; Margolis, 2013; Padilla, 2007; Assis, 2007; Assis and Siqueira, 2009; Badet, 2011; Evans et al., 2013, 2015; McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016).

Macro-explanations based on the economic and political crisis in Brazil in the late 1980s and 1990s have been reported as one motivation for the migration of Brazilian women to the UK (Torresan, 1995; Margolis, 2013). Some of the Brazilian migrant women in this research pointed to these factors as being relevant to their migration. They had a low to middle-class background in Brazil and the crisis in the late 1980s and 1990s affected their entry and consolidation into the Brazilian labour market (see Bruschini, 1994, about Brazilian women and the labour market). The following accounts illustrate this: *'I had finished my degree in History in Brazil, but there were no jobs. By that time, I was working as a telephone operator'* (Lucia, who moved to the UK in 1986); *'I was a secretary in an office, and they paid very little, then I thought why not go to London, to improve my English, and return to try a job as an international secretary'* (Zilda, who moved to the UK in 1989); *'It was all too hard, I had a degree, but it was hard to get a job, or when you got one it was very little money'* (Helena, who moved to the UK in 1991).

Besides the economic and political crisis in Brazil of the late 1980s and the 1990s, other studies have considered the labour market niche demand for reproductive jobs in the destination countries (as cleaners, babysitters, carers for the elderly) as helping to influence Brazilian women's migration. Padilla (2007), Assis (2007) and Badet (2011) consider this as one of the important factors motivating Brazilian migrant women to go to Portugal, the US or Spain. It has also been noted as a relevant factor in the migration of Latin American women, Brazilian women particularly, to the UK (Evans et al., 2013, 2015; McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016). Two

participants of this research, for example, recalled moving to the UK to study English and work as an *au pair*. Laura, who moved to the UK in 1985, was hired to take care of two children, and Claudia, who moved to the UK in 1986, looked after an elderly couple. According to Margolis (2013) and McIlwaine and Carlisle (2011), Brazilian women have, since the beginning, been incorporated into the UK labour market mainly in reproductive jobs, such as cleaners, *au pairs*, and babysitters. According to McIlwaine and Bunge (2016), it has been a historical labour pattern among Latin Americans in the UK.

In addition, meso and micro-level explanations, such as the social network of family members and even the search for a new lifestyle<sup>11</sup> have also appeared as important motivations for Brazilian women to migrate to the UK (Evans et al., 2013). Studies have revealed that Brazilian women tend to migrate within family networks much more than Brazilian men and tend to report searching for a ‘new’ lifestyle (Padilla, 2007; Assis and Siqueira, 2009). In my own research, some participants reported that their decision to migrate to the UK was also influenced by the fact that they had relatives living in the UK at the time they were travelling, or had relatives who had been to the UK before. For example, Lucia’s uncle had been studying in the UK. She and her grandmother went to visit him and she decided to stay. As she said: *‘Here I could work, save some money, travel, go to museums, theatres, it was a different life’*. In other cases, the participants recalled having a brother or cousin who had lived for a short time in the UK, usually studying and/or working, who provided them with information about the UK. Another participant (Carla, who moved to the UK in 2000) recalled that her friend who was travelling with her had an uncle living in London, and they stayed a couple of weeks with him while they decided whether or not to remain in the country. Family and friends’ networks actually encouraged and enabled the participants of this research to migrate to the UK. Moreover, family members in Brazil also helped the participants’ migration move by lending money; one participant reported that her aunt had lent her some money to pay for the flight, and another recalled that one aunt had helped her to get an international bank card.

Therefore, in general, studies have considered that the profile of the Brazilian women who moved to the UK in the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s was mainly young women in their twenties, from a lower to middle-class background, with a high educational level,

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<sup>11</sup> On lifestyle migration see O’Reilly and Benson (2009)



predominantly from southeastern and southern states of Brazil. They moved in order to study (learn English), work, travel and/or experience a different life, usually informed by previous experiences of family members or friends (Torresan, 1995; Margolis, 2013). The profile of the Brazilian migrant women of this research, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 3, was very similar to that described by previous studies.

In addition, the surveys of Evans et al. (2013; 2015)<sup>12</sup> conducted by GEB's members, in which I participated as a researcher and co-author, shed further light on the Brazilian women's profile in the UK, considering variables such as: age, education level, state of origin, migration status, labour activities. Most importantly, these surveys brought some preliminary information on their main difficulties and links with Brazil. Thus, my work on these surveys and my autobiographical experiences, which I describe in more detail in Chapter 3, were relevant to the elaboration of the first steps of this research.

With regard to the age distribution, Evans et al.'s (2013; 2015) surveys show that most of the Brazilian women in the UK interviewed were aged between 30 and 49 years old, and had lived in the UK for more than 10 years. The data suggest that they probably arrived in the UK in their twenties, and overstayed initial plans. Moreover, these surveys show that these Brazilian women had completed a high level of education (degree) before leaving Brazil. In terms of region or state of origin, the surveys reveal that the Brazilian women came mainly from the southeastern states of Brazil (São Paulo, Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro) and southern states (Paraná, Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul). São Paulo state was the leading emigration state with the highest proportion of Brazilian women surveyed being born here.

These surveys also provide information about the Brazilian women's migration status, both on entry to the UK and at the time of their participation in the surveys, illustrating the changes they experienced in their migration status over time. Indeed, these changes were themselves dictated by the conditions attached to their type of visa and migration policies. Evans et al.'s (2013 and 2015) data show that the most significant change in Brazilian women's migration status was the proportion of women who had obtained a tourist visa on admission to the country compared with those who still had that visa at the time of the study. On the other hand, there was an increase in the number of women who had obtained a European passport for the time of residence and an increase was also noted in the number of women who had obtained an indefinite visa. Moreover, an increase was noted in the numbers of Brazilian

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<sup>12</sup> Evans et al.'s (2013) survey interviewed 119 Brazilian women and the fieldwork was carried out in 2012. Evans et al.'s (2015) survey was carried out in 2013, interviewing 440 Brazilian women in the UK.

women who had obtained a European passport through union with a European citizen. Also, in both surveys, in response to questions regarding labour activities, the Brazilian migrant women reported working mostly in the private sector, in activities such as cleaning, waitressing, teaching, as sale assistants or self-employed (in the catering sector).

At the end of the surveys, Evans et al. (2013 and 2015) asked about the main difficulties Brazilians faced in their lives in the UK. The Brazilian migrant women's answers included accessing public services, missing their family in Brazil, and problems with the cost of living, discrimination and migration status. Asked about their transnational links, most of the women stressed their links with their family members (parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters), as their main connection with Brazil. Regarding the means of communication used, most of the Brazilian women reported using video communication (Skype) with their family in Brazil and only a few reported using Facebook and e-mail.

Having participated in both surveys (as researcher and co-author) the Brazilian migrant women's answers regarding these two last questions caught my attention. I noted that even those Brazilian migrant women who were married and had children in the UK stressed the importance of being in touch with family members in Brazil. Also, during my participation in the THEMIS<sup>13</sup> research project in 2011 and 2012, I had noted the importance of 'doing family' with family members in Brazil for the Brazilian migrant women I interviewed for that research. As it was an important issue for the Brazilian migrant women, I decided to make it the main focus of my study and empirically engage with some Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil to understand more about the family practices that they construct from a distance.

In the next section of this introduction chapter, I briefly outline the historical-cultural construction of the importance of family in Brazil, focusing on changes and continuities, to help contextualize the importance of 'doing family' for Brazilian women, even over many years of geographical separation due to their migration to the UK. I do not intend here to define or propose any general ideas about the Brazilian family, but I strongly argue that it has been a constructed process. Thus, the historical perspective presented aims to contextualize the fabrication process of the Brazilian family.

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<sup>13</sup> THEMIS Project (Theorizing the Evolution of European Migration System, International Migration Institute)  
– <https://www.imi.ox.ac.uk/completed-projects/themis>

#### 4. Framing the Brazilian family

*[in Brazil] 'Those who do not have family deserve our pity, even before they begin their life drama; and those who deny their family have, from the inception, our most open antipathy' (DaMatta, 1987:125).*

At a very general level, it has been well documented that family life plays a central role in shaping Latin Americans' life experiences. It has been a hallmark characteristic that Latin Americans strongly value family members; the close ones (such as mother, father and siblings) as well as the extended family (e.g. aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews and grandparents), and also family interactions, practices, events and rituals. Indeed, many studies consider that family life plays a significant role in institutional arrangements and in the everyday dynamics of Latin Americans' lives (see Carlo et al., 2007; Dessen and Torres, 2002; Falicov, 2014; McIlwaine, 2010).

Historically, the importance of family to Latin Americans in general, and Brazilians in particular, has usually been traced back to the colonial origins (McIlwaine, 2010). In the Brazilian case, this includes the Portuguese colonizers who established a patriarchal organization consisting of extended kinship, divided gender roles and child-rearing. Throughout Brazilian family studies, patriarchal ideas have been considered as a starting point for the Brazilian family, and even the core foundation of Brazilian society (Freyre, 1992 [1933]; Buarque de Holanda, 1995 [1936]). These ideas presupposed the submission of all (relatives and/or dependents) to the power of the *pater familias*, a man who had the power over all who were under his authority, such as his wife, children, clans and slaves. The women, for example, should first obey their father and then their husband (Scott, 2013). In this family organization model, the family was responsible for providing all the sources of financial, material and emotional support, with its function also as an economic and political authority (Dessen, 2010 and Neder, 1998).

The socializing structure and actions of the family patriarchal model in Brazilian colonial times as determinant and/or homogeneous all over Brazil has been questioned by scholars (see Almeida, 1987; Barsted, 1987; DaMatta, 1987; Velho, 1987; Corrêa, 1994). In reality, these scholars have affirmed, this dominant model coexisted with several different family configurations and dynamics, which differ among the various regions of the country, as well as among those of different class and race (Samara, 2004). Although the patriarchal organization and structure were not homogenous across the country, these scholars agree that

its notion prevailed in the ways of thinking, acting and political approaches to the family in Brazil. It also influenced expectations about the roles of women and men in the family, serving to strengthen the orientation towards familial interdependence and notion of the family as the main source of social support and welfare (Corrêa, 1994; Sarti, 2005; Samara, 2004; Bruschini, 2000; Souza and Botelho, 2001).

However, scholars such as Candido (1951) have shown that, due to the great immigration of Europeans to Brazil and the uprooting of the process of urbanization and industrialization of the 1930s, the idea of the 'modern conjugal family' overtook the extended patriarchal family (Scott, 2013:34). During this period, Brazil linked its underdevelopment to its agrarian character, which included the patriarchal extended family model. The dominant urban groups concentrated in the southeast of the country, rather than in the northeast as in the colonial period, were concerned with constructing a modern society (Schwarcz, 2012). Several campaigns for modernization, along with the European ideas of family, which came with their mass migration at the beginning of the twentieth century to the southern and southeastern states (as outlined in the previous section) made the 'modern conjugal family' – the nuclear family – a dominant model to be followed (Dessen, 2010; Scott, 2013; Dessen and Torres, 2002; Teruya, 2010).

The dominant family idea became that of 'home sweet home', where the family members would find in their homes a sense of 'protection', 'cosiness' and 'hygiene' (Scott, 2013: 45). A more intimate preoccupation with privacy set the tone, and the 'new family' demanded a 'new woman' who still had to be at home, but now the home was a separate place from the political and economic domain (Scott, 2013: 46). The 'street' (where the economic, labour and political activities occurred) belonged to the man, and the 'house' to the woman, who had to be a dedicated mother who paid special attention to family care, daily routines, rituals, events, celebrations and traditions (DaMatta, 1987). The Brazilian women were responsible for the moral training of the children and for maintaining the family's social bonds, as well as being expected to be the affectionate wife who, while responsible for managing the house, still had to be submissive to her husband (Pinsky and Pedro, 2013; Pinsky, 2013a).

The Brazilian family set-up in 'modern models' maintained and reinforced the gender division. The role of Brazilian women in the family was to have responsibility for taking care of their sons, daughters and parents, formation of healthy offspring and providing the input to keep the family together. When the children married, especially the daughters, it was expected that they would live near their parents, and contribute as part of the family unit. The elderly

parents were also expected to live nearby to be taken care of by their children, usually their daughters (Bilac, 1995; Barsted, 1995; Scott, 2013). During the 1930s, 40s and 50s this became the family parameter. There was an explicit concern on the part of the government and even the Catholic Church with the organization and protection of this model of ‘the family’. In the Brazilian case, scholars such as Biasoli-Alves (2000) and Dessen (2010) argue that the Catholic Church reinforced the notion of the nuclear family model along with nation state policies. For example, in the Decree Law 3,200, dated 19 April 1941, signed by President Getúlio Vargas, about education and gender roles in Brazilian society:

Men should be educated so that they become fully fit for the responsibility of heads of household. Women will be given an education that will make them fond of marriage, desirous of motherhood, competent for child-rearing, and capable of administering the household (in Scott, 2013:20, translated by the current author into English).

This view of the Brazilian family prevailed up to the 1960s and 70s, when a number of changes occurred in Brazil, some inspired by the Brazilian feminist movement which questioned gender roles and the destiny of Brazilian women to be tied to marriage, motherhood and household tasks (Dessen and Braz, 2005; Dessen and Torres, 2002; Dessen, 2010; Scott, 2013; Pinsky, 2013b). The increase in female participation in the labour market; greater access to formal education; the feminine conquest of the power to decide if and when they would become a mother (with the availability of more effective contraceptive methods); the institution of divorce (by law in December 1977); the possibility of establishing other affective relationships (e.g. lesbian relationships, which had slowly gained some visibility in the media and legitimacy in society); a law that formally recognized the equality of men and women in marriage in the 1988 Constitution; and claims for the legalization of abortion, which is still prohibited today, were all transformations that allowed, in the early 1980s, a phenomenon called the ‘reinvention of women’ (Pinsky, 2013b:514) and, consequently, their roles in the Brazilian family (see Goldani, 1994; Petrucelli, 1998; Monteiro, 1998; Pinsky and Pedro, 2013; Scoot, 2013).

From a family model built on a strong hierarchical basis, there was a move to a more ‘democratic’ family model (to use Giddens, 1992’ term), in relation to men and women’s gender roles, as well as parents and children’s relationships, especially with daughters, who no longer had marriage and motherhood as their only, or socially more desired, destiny (Pinsky, 2013b; Scott, 2013). The divorce rate increased steadily, the number of children dropped considerably (particularly among the middle class), sex for women was no longer restricted to marriage and, in the search for jobs and/or going to study, daughters tended to live further from

their parents. Such changes in the Brazilian family dynamic contributed to widening Brazilian women's perspectives and multiplying the destinies that young women, in particular, could have.

Although there was an increase in female participation in the labour market in Brazil and more 'freedom' of destiny (besides marriage and children) in the late 1980s and 1990s, Brazilian women still struggled to find employment and professional growth. The political and economic crisis made it even worse in the 1980s and 1990s. In this context, international migration emerged for some as one way of improving their educational skills, financial situation and even as an opportunity to '*see the world*' as some of the participants of this study mentioned.

Recent studies such as those by Dessen (2010), Pinsky (2013b) and Scott (2013), which look at the family dynamic in Brazil from the 1990s onwards, have shown that while Brazilian family configurations and dynamics have differed from previous periods, the importance given to family relationships and practices by Brazilians has survived the changes, by being adapted. They state that families in Brazil have continued to practise family leisure, routines and rituals (e.g. going shopping, going to the cinema, eating-out, making the bed, celebrating wedding parties, birthdays of children, or birthday celebrations of grandparents, Christmas parties, and so on) (Dessen, 2010; Biasoli-Alves, 2000).

Thus, while for the Brazilian women from the lower and middle classes, entry into international migration could be seen as the result of more alternatives and opportunities being open to them (though still unequal in comparison with men), and lead to the suggestion that they are less concerned with the family, it is an open empirical question. In fact, studies such as those of Evans et al. (2013; 2015) appear to show that Brazilian migrant women in the UK still value and practise family relationships from a distance, but the empirical details are lacking. Thus, this thesis aims to find out how Brazilian migrant women 'do' family with their family members in Brazil, and the importance of this in keeping alive their sense of familyhood.

## **5. The objectives of this research**

My research aims to find out how Brazilian migrant women 'do family' with their family members in Brazil and the family practices described by them which create their sense of familyhood over a long period of geographical separation. In this vein, I show that for the Brazilian transnational families studied in this research, among various transnational family practices (e.g. sending of remittances, care providing), they highlighted certain family rituals

and some family practices with ritualist features, as the main activities that tied them together. Thus, I argue in this study that the ritualization of family practices at a distance over the migration process was reported by the group studied here as being important for the constitution and reconstitution of their sense of familyhood. My research objectives were therefore undertaken through the following:

- Analysis of family practices ritualized at a distance, which were mentioned by the Brazilian women migrants in the UK as connecting them with their family members back home in Brazil, monthly, weekly or daily.
- Analysis of how the Brazilian women migrants in the UK and their family members in Brazil practised family rituals such as birthdays and Christmas. They were noted by the participants as ways of keeping them connected to their family's annual calendar.
- Finally, investigation into how the Brazilian women migrants in the UK and their family members in Brazil practised life-cycle rituals from a distance, such as marriage, the birth of children, and the death of a loved one.

## 6. Outline of the chapters

**Chapter 2** outlines the main theoretical discussion that informs the framework of this study – transnational family studies. As this framework considers the interplay between the broader processes of migration and the family, the theoretical review draws on literature from a range of disciplines and areas, including migration, feminist and family studies. The first and second parts show the interplay of transnational family studies with transnational and feminist approaches to migration. The third part outlines the interface of transnational family studies with family studies. In this third part I discuss the analytical toolkit for the transnational family based on the care approach. Finally, in the last part, I show how the notion of ritualization and family rituals can be a useful analytical toolkit to answer this study's research questions. This chapter, then, provides a brief overview of the vast array of ritual literature and focuses on the discussion of family rituals, which contributes to the analysis of the empirical material.

While the previous chapter sets out the conceptual and analytical framework of this thesis, **Chapter 3** outlines the methodological approach adopted in the study. In order to address the objectives of this thesis, the methodology chosen as being most suitable was based on a qualitative approach, using multi-sited ethnography at participants' houses, biographical interviews and diaries. The first part of the chapter discusses the wider methodological debate on researching transnational families, and the methods chosen. In the second part, I describe in

detail the development and choices made in the research and reveal the numerous challenges I faced in the research fieldwork. Finally, in the third part of this chapter I reflect on the research ethics and on how this research was a co-produced process.

**Chapter 4** is the first empirical chapter and it analyses the family practices described by the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil as being important to their daily, weekly or monthly construction of family times during their migration. The first family practice that they reported was the writing and exchanging of letters, which prevailed in the late 1980s and 1990s until the early 2000s. Second, they described the family practice of talking on the telephone, which happened concomitantly with the first practice. The analysis of these two family practices revealed that they had been distinguished by the participants as having some ritualistic features, which was important to them in their construction of a sense of familyhood. In the second part of the chapter I discuss the incorporation of new technologies into the participants' family lives, and their practice of talking on Skype as their most recent family times, from the mid-2000s, which allowed them to share, from a distance, some previously constructed family rituals such as cooking and eating together, and watching TV.

**Chapter 5** outlines the annual family rituals such as birthdays and Christmas. These are practices that have been historically, culturally, socially and biographically constructed as family rituals and become important family times that mark events and bind family members in an annual family calendar. Birthdays and Christmas were the main annual family rituals mentioned by the Brazilian migrant women as being important to share with their family members in Brazil. I therefore divided the chapter into two parts, disclosing the narratives of the participants relating to each of these two family rituals. With regard to birthdays and Christmas, the participants explain how they celebrated these family rituals when there were only the 'old means of communication' (letter and telephone), and how things changed when new technologies, such as Skype, became available to them. In addition, they emphasize the importance of being able to participate in these family rituals in person by visiting a family member in Brazil.

**Chapter 6** examines how the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil engage in the so-called life-cycle events such as marriages, births and deaths. These life-cycle moments have been constructed as family rituals and are important in connecting family members in the long pathways of their life-course. Thus, I have organized Chapter 6 into three main parts. In the first two parts I unpack how the Brazilian migrant women participants of this study reported celebrating their own weddings and the births of their children with their family members in Brazil, and how they also engaged with some of their family members' weddings



and nieces and nephews' births. Finally, in the last part, I unveil how the Brazilian migrant women dealt with a loved one's death at a distance.

**Chapter 7** is the last chapter of this thesis and outlines the main findings of the research. In this chapter I go back to my original question of how Brazilian migrant women 'do family' with their family members in Brazil. I highlight the main empirical findings of this thesis and some analytical and conceptual contributions this study makes to the field of transnational family. Finally, the chapter ends by outlining future avenues for research.

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## Chapter 2

### **The transnational family: migration and family rituals**

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This thesis dialogues with the body of literature on transnational families. This term was defined by Bryceson and Vuorela (2002a:3) as ‘families that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely “familyhood”, even across national borders’. In this light, transnational family studies emphasize the sense of belonging to a family, even in the context of physical absence and distance for an extended period of time. Thus, the central argument of this framework is that ‘rather than fragmenting or disintegrating as a result of migration, family relationships simply transform and are reconstituted in new forms’ (Reynolds and Zontini, 2014a:266). In accord with this, Baldassar et al. (2007:13) suggest that the aim of transnational family studies is ‘to capture the growing awareness that members of families retain their sense of collectivity and kinship in spite of being spread across multiple nations’. Thus, it challenges the stereotypical notions of families of international migrants in public discourses as either ‘broken’ or ‘vulnerable’ (Herrera, 2011:53). Although the transnational family debate considers that family life continues at a distance, how exactly it happens is an open empirical question.

In this chapter I review the broader body of research on migration and family studies that interfaces with transnational family studies and has helped this thesis conceptually in the analysis of the empirical material. I divided this literature review into five parts. The first part identifies some transnational approaches of migration studies, which contributed to my study on transnational family relationships. While reviewing the migration studies literature, I observed that the feminist migration debates and family studies also have interfaces with transnational family studies and provide insights for this research which I discuss in the second and third parts of this literature review. In the fourth part of this literature review, I discuss the care-giving analytical approach to the transnational family. Finally, in the last part I discuss the ritualization of family ties and the construction of family rituals. This proved to be a powerful

analytical tool to reflect on transnational family life as constructed by the Brazilian migrant women participants of this study with their family members in Brazil.

### **1. Migration studies: the transnational approach and transnational families**

As argued by Castles, Haas and Miller (2014:25) ‘migration is hardly ever a simple individual action in which a person decides to move in search of better life-chances, pulls up her roots in the place of origin and quickly becomes assimilated in a new country’. In fact, migration has been considered a much more ‘long-drawn-out’ process, which is played out throughout the migrant’s life, rather than being just a moment of their life. It affects the one who migrates, those who stay behind and the next generations too. In addition, migration as a life experience often changes from the original plans. It is a multifaceted process. Migration studies vary in their theories and the approach taken to try to explain migratory movements, their consequences, continuities or interruptions. Massey et al. (1993), Arango (2000) and King (2012) are among the authors, along with Castles, Haas and Miller (2014) who have tried to summarize the main migration theories. According to these scholars, migration studies with a more ‘macro-structure’ viewpoint tend to refer to large-scale institutional factors, such as the political economy of the world labour market, interstate relationships, and state policies and regulations to control migration (as outlined in Chapter 1 regarding explanations for Brazilian migration). On the other hand, there are the studies which lean more to ‘micro-structure’ viewpoints which embrace the practices, family ties and beliefs of the migrants themselves. Then there are the ‘meso-structure’ studies that focus more on understanding migrant networks, communities, business sectors and the migration industry. At a more macro level there are theories such as functionalist push-pull models, neoclassical (human capital) and historical-structural (e.g. globalization theories; segmented labour market). These approaches are ‘very deterministic and give too much emphasis to political and economic structures and usually portray human beings as passive’ (Castles, Haas and Miller, 2014:26)

However, since the 1990s there has been an increase in the number of studies giving emphasis to the migrants’ agency and describing the various ways that migrants have actively and creatively overcome structural constraints, being active agents in the construction and reconstruction of their migration experiences. Most of these theories have their focus on micro and meso-levels, and are interested in how the migrants create social life, social networks, and

their own personal and family lives. It is with this last perspective that scholars such as Castles, Haas and Miller (2014) framed the transnational migration approach.

The transnational approach originated with the study of migration into the US in the 1990s. In fact, most of the early conceptualizations of transnationalism and transnational migration were rooted in empirical research on the lives of Latin Americans in the United States (see Glick-Schiller et al., 1992; Basch et al., 1994; Portes et al., 1999; Levitt and Glick-Schiller, 2004; Portes, 2001). Those migration scholars who were researching the Latin American migrants to the US realized that previous migration studies were too linear and unilateral to fully comprehend the impact, consequences and dynamics of these migrant lives. Thus, authors such as Glick-Schiller et al. (1992), Basch et al. (1994), and Portes et al. (1999) recognized that, in fact, migrants maintain a multiplicity of involvements in both the host and home societies. Mahler (1998:74) describes how, in May 1990, several researchers organized a workshop in an effort to conceptualize and define transnational migration. Levitt and Glick-Schiller (2004:40) stated that ‘there was a call for a transnational perspective on migration’. After this event, the seminal work of Glick-Schiller et al. (1992) was considered the foundation for the transnational approach in migration studies. In this book, the authors argue:

We have defined transnationalism as the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement. Immigrants who build such social fields are designated “transmigrants”. Transmigrants develop and maintain multiple relations - familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political that span borders. Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and feel concerns, and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously. (Glick-Schiller et al., 1992:1)

It is important to highlight that the term transnational/transnationalism was already being used a long time previously in social studies, as stated by Mahler (1998:66), ‘[...] as early as 1916, authors employed the term’. However, it only started causing some ‘fission’ in the academic world from the 1990s onwards, as the term gained new analytical potential due to the transformations in society during this period. Indeed, although the term was not new, living transnationally incorporated elements of novelty. Within this complex historical transformation:

[...] the globalization of capitalism with its destabilizing effects on less industrialized countries; the technological revolution in the means of transportation and communication; global political transformations such as decolonization and the universalization of human rights; and the expansion of social networks facilitate the reproduction of transnational migration, economic organization, and politics. (Smith and Guarnizo, 1998:4)

Several academic debates have emerged to explain these historical transformations and migration in this context. In the following sections I demonstrate in more detail how some of the debates on transnational migration such as the challenge of '*methodological nationalism*' (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller, 2003), the '*from above and from below*' debates, and the discussion of 'then' and 'now' connections on transnational migration are relevant to a study, such as this thesis, on transnational family interactions (Smith and Guarnizo, 1998; Smith, 2005).

### ***The challenge of methodological nationalism***

Migration studies before the 1990s tended to look at the origin and destination societies separately and disregard the relationships that people continue to develop, even when they are geographically separated. Wimmer and Glick-Schiller (2003) in their proposition of looking at migration with transnational lenses argued for an alternative to such a dichotomized notion between the home and host societies. They argued that this template for studying migration was based on a methodological nationalism view, which had 'the assumption that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world' (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller, 2003:1). These scholars showed how this seemingly unproblematic division of home and host societies in previous migration studies had tended to privilege the straight-line theory of assimilation as the end result of migration. Thus, migration was usually conceptualized as finite and unidirectional, in which the aim was considered to be permanent settlement.

Therefore, studies about migration and the family, up to the 1990s, were focusing mainly on one locality, either on the leaving places, where the focus was on the separation of the family members, or on their adoption into the host societies and the constitution of new families. For example, see Seyferth (1989) on Germany migrants in Brazil. Up to the transnational turn, very little attention was given to the interconnections among migrants and the non-migrant family members. However, the lack of focus on the interconnections between the migrants and non-migrant family members 'left-behind' does not mean that those interconnections did not exist. Bryceson (2002) shows, in a historical perspective of European transnational families which I discuss below, that transnational family connections existed a long time previously. The point is that the main focus of migration research before the 1990s was on other areas, such as assimilation and labour market insertion. In addition, up to that

time very little attention was given to women migrants. Migration was explained based on the nuclear family model bias (Morokvasic, 1984) which also meant there was less focus on the family relationships constructed at a distance. The feminist turns to look at women's migrant experiences led to research giving more attention to family relationships. I return to this point in a later section.

Hence, the transnational migration perspective questions the rigid division made by other studies between the home and host societies and contributes to countering previous conceptualizations of family life in the context of migration as detached and with no connections. According to Baldassar and Merla (2014b:40), the transnational perspective has allowed the dominant assumption that sees migration as 'a process that literally and symbolically breaks away from the norm of sedentary and therefore results in divided state loyalties [and], fractured families' to be confronted.

The transnational approach, then, allows a better understanding of family life, in the context of migration, going beyond linear explanations, which used to link the family to a 'private geographic domain represented by the household, presuming sedentarism, physical co-presence as a way to maintain family solidarity and care' (Baldassar and Merla, 2014b:40). Family life in migration, under the lens of the transnational perspective, thus, could be interpreted as not ruptured or dismantled. In this sense, the concepts such as 'global household' (Kofman, 2012) or 'transnational domestic sphere' (Gardner and Grillo, 2002) have emerged. These concepts tend to better capture the dynamic of family life in the situational context of migration. For example, in this vein of overcoming methodological nationalism several empirical studies have described and analysed the family relationships and practices shared by migrant parents and children left behind, migrant adult-children and elderly parents, couples' interactions at a distance, and so on (I return to these examples later in this chapter). Thus, rather than only looking at the particularities of family relationships based on the nation of origin or the adaptation to the roles and rules of host societies, the transnational approach contributes to thinking about family life interactions and the social relations constituted and reconstituted at a distance. These would link those who move away and those who stay behind.

The notion of overcoming the methodological nationalism through the transnational approach has informed this study conceptually and methodologically. My study looks at the interconnections developed by the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil. Methodologically, I focus on the stories of the Brazilian migrant women in the UK as

well as on the stories told by their family members in Brazil, described in more detail in Chapter 3.

While recognizing that family life is not necessarily interrupted or ‘broken’ due to migration and that family members construct interconnections at a distance, I look at the transnational family interconnections in this study, as Guarnizo and Smith (1998:11) note, ‘the image of transnational migrants as deterritorialized, free-floating people deserves closer scrutiny’. I argue that transnational family relationships are diverse and do not ‘flow’ without constraints or are maintained by all migrants and their family members in equal proportion or capacity. Transnational ties of actual lived experiences of migrants occur at a local level and can influence how these transnational practices are negotiated. This leads into the next section on debates about transnationalism from above and from below.

### ***Beyond transnationalism ‘from above’ and ‘from below’ debates***

Seeking to define ‘transnational’, some scholars initially came up with ideas of ‘autonomous space’, ‘space of flows’ and connections between distant locations, the compression of time and space, as well as advocating the notion of the world as a place without borders, questioning the nation-state as a model which organizes social relations (see Castells, 1996; Harvey, 1999; Urry, 2003; Kearney, 1995). Such perspectives were usually concerned with what Portes et al. (1999) call transnationalism ‘from above’, and they tended to affirm that the nation-state had become fragile due to the emergence of transnational capital, the global media, and emergent supra-national political institutions. Some of the activities that fall within the label of ‘from above’ are mapped by Portes et al. (1999:222) and include ‘multinational investments in Third World countries, development of the tourist market of locations abroad, agencies of home country banks in migrant centres’ as some of the highly institutionalized economic activities. He also identifies political examples of transnationalism ‘from above’: ‘consular officials and representatives of national political parties abroad, dual nationality granted by home country governments, immigrants elected to home country legislatures’, and finally, there are the socio-cultural examples of transnationalism ‘from above’: ‘international expositions of national arts, home country major artists perform abroad, regular cultural events organized by foreign embassies’ (Portes et al., 1999:222). They also identified some examples of transnationalism which occur ‘from below’ at the more grassroots level:

Economic: informal cross-country traders, small businesses created by returned immigrants in the home country, long-distance circular labour migration; Political: home

town civic committees created by immigrants; alliances of immigrant committees with home country political associations; fund raisers for home country electoral candidates; Socio-cultural: amateur cross-country sport matches, folk music groups making presentations in immigrant centres, priests from the home town visit and organize their parishioners abroad (Portes et al., 1999: 222).

Smith and Guarnizo (1998) identify that transnational activities such as the ones described above are carried out by ordinary people to escape the control and domination of transnationalism 'from above'. According to them, the activities 'from below' are usually considered as 'decentring local resistances of the informal economy, ethnic nationalism and grassroots activism' and are consequently seen as expressions of 'subversive popular resistance' (Smith and Guarnizo, 1998:3). In this vein, they argue that cultural hybridity, multi-positional identities, border-crossing by marginal others, and transnational business practices by migrant entrepreneurs have emerged to express this transnationalism 'from below' (see Appadurai, 1991). However, Smith and Guarnizo (1998:6) suggest that these 'from above' and 'from below' transnational practices 'do not take place in an imaginary "third place" (Bhabha, 1990) abstractly located "in between" national territories'. They affirm that:

Transnational practices, while connecting collectivities located in more than one national territory, are embodied in specific social relations established between specific people, situated in unequivocal localities, at historically determined times. The 'locality' thus needs to be further conceptualized (Smith and Guarnizo, 1998:4).

Authors such as Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2007) similarly call for attention to the importance of locality in transnational migration studies. They highlight the power of global forces in people's migration, determining whether they integrate into their host societies and develop new identities, social relationships and subjectivities. But they also stress the ways in which migrants' experiences and livelihoods are in various aspects detached from the respective national sending and receiving contexts and rather tend to be expressed and inscribed within particular time-spaces, usually within a city and neighbourhood locality. Brickell and Datta (2011) also make a convincing case to look at 'translocal' spaces, which they argue reflect the real world, in which the transnational migrants are really linked, for example their villages of origin and/or the urban neighbourhoods in which they settle in the host society. Knowles and Harper (2009) also argue that the idea that people and things 'flow' conveys an unreal form of conceptualized migration. Thus, the image of transnational migrants as 'deterritorialized' and 'free-floating' in a 'space of flows' has been questioned. Smith



(2005:242) argues that this has led to a call ‘for greater attention to the “everyday” practices’ of migrants.

According to Smith (2005), it is a fact that since the 1990s, dense social ties and intense exchanges by migrants across national borders have reached unprecedented levels. Nonetheless, this author stresses that it is important not to establish a rigid distinction between ‘from above’ and ‘from below’ transnational practices. He argues that this could nurture the formulation of metaphors of transnational relationships as being boundless, uprooted and, therefore, liberating. Such assumptions are groundless, lacking in empirical evidence, and they disregard the constraints, inequalities, negotiations, obligations and the capacity and opportunities that constitute the migration experience. Thus, Smith (2005) argues that it would be a mistake to equate ‘above’ exclusively with global structures or agents and ‘below’ exclusively with ‘local’ social fields or actors. This distinction should be considered as relational. Smith (2001) argues that these categories are contextual and relational rather than essential or immutable. For this author, studies looking at transnational relationships should look beyond the notion of ‘from above’ and ‘from below’ as this disregards the ‘local’ dynamics of transnationalism.

In a similar vein, some scholars such as Ley (2004), Knowles (2003), Knowles and Harper (2009) and Conradson and Lathan (2005) want to focus on human agency and looking at the ‘microworld’ of the everyday life of migrants (to use Knowles and Harper’ (2009:19) term). Knowles (2003:110), for example, note: ‘it is people who connect places, who have a sense of what is bigger and beyond the units in which they live’. Thus, it is important to ask people about what is relevant to them.

Scholars concerned with transnational family lives, such as Bryceson and Vuorella (2002), Baldassar et al. (2007), Baldassar and Merla (2014), Boccagni, (2008; 2012), Brickell (2011) and Olwig (2014), among others, call for ‘locating’ transnationalism studies within family dynamics. Notions of ‘translocal’ studies, which stress the importance of giving emphasis to what migrants actually do and empirically based studies on exactly how transnationalism operates in the ‘real-world’ have been incorporated into some of the studies of transnational family life (Kilkey and Merla, 2014). Transnational family scholars tend to recognize that family members living far apart construct ties at a distance and are no longer liberated from their social and moral responsibilities towards family life. In addition, the migrants and non-migrant family members have to negotiate their capacity to ‘do family’ at a distance in line with their ‘local’ reality.

The debate on ‘translocal’ studies which calls for a focus on human agency and the ‘microworld’ (Knowles and Harper, 2009:19) of the everyday life of migrants is important to this thesis. It contributes to an understanding of the importance of empirical research in studying transnational practices. Thus, it was only through asking Brazilian migrant women in the UK what they considered as constituting their family ties with their family members in Brazil that I could understand their transnational practices. This debate also contributed to the study in terms of understanding that transnational family relationships could not be approached as ‘free-floating’ or ‘deterritorialized’ (Smith, 2005). I had to look at the transnational family practices of the Brazilian migrant women in the UK and their family members in Brazil as intermingled with the social constraints and inequalities that they faced in their ‘local’ realities in Brazil and London, which could affect their capacity and opportunity to ‘do family’ at a distance.

Besides shedding light on the migrants’ lived experiences, the transnational debate has also emphasised the importance of understanding that transnational family practices are not a recent creation. They have, in fact, been historically constructed over time, but what has changed in some cases is the regularity and form of the connections. According to Smith (2005), they have to be empirically studied. This leads to the next point of this literature review.

***‘Regularities of connections’: instantaneous communication and fast travel***

Transnational families, or what are sometimes referred to as multi-local or multi-sited families, or families living in spatial separation, are certainly not creations of recent globalizing trends but have played an integral part in European colonial and settler histories. However, it is only with the creation of the “informational society” and transnational restructurings of capitalist production and international trade that they are increasingly becoming a pronounced part of everyday European ways of life (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002a:7).

Smith (2005) argues that historicizing transnational practices has been an important step to guard them against timeless and de-contextual ideas. According to him, transnational practices should not be detached from the historical and geographical contexts of their emergence. The contextualization process is also important to contest any celebratory images of ‘transnational practices as post-national and alternatives to global capitalism’ (239). Moreover, he argues that historicizing transnational practices is important to differentiate between what is new about the contemporary transnationalism and earlier instances of transnational migration.

Scholars of transnational family life, such as Bryceson (2002), have shown that transnational families are not a new phenomenon. Bryceson goes back in time to show that transnational families are part of European history (her focus of analysis) and ‘post-date the formation of European nation states by definition’ (2002:32). Looking at pre-industrial Europe before the 1840s she states that ‘Europe’s first transnational families were primarily drawn from the nobility and extremely wealthy merchant classes’ (2002:33). She argues:

[...] being relatively well endowed with wealth, communications and transport, they could retain family links with their home countries, where they eventually planned to return, tropical fortune and health permitting. However, these early colonial settlers and civil service personnel represented a trickle in comparison to the flood of people who left Europe and crossed the Atlantic in the nineteenth century, particularly during the latter half of the century (Bryceson, 2002:33).

Bryceson (2002), then, emphasizes that up to the nineteenth century, examples of transnational families were exceptional cases, but this changed with the mass settler movement between 1840 and 1910 of European migrants into Africa, the Americas (including Brazil, as shown in Chapter 1) and Oceania. She affirms that family connections continued during these times through the sending of letters and word-of-mouth during visits, as the classical study of Thomas and Znaniecki (1974 [1918/1920]) for example shows. Bryceson argues that from the 1950s onwards the main direction of migration changed. Europe became a destination rather than a sending place and now the transnational family connections became more diverse and included ‘a more varied mosaic of countries represented in the migration stream’, coming from Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America (Bryceson, 2002:41; see also Vertovec, 2007; McIlwaine, 2011a). She convincingly demonstrates how it is historically inaccurate to regard transnational families as the result of the most recent offspring ‘of the current round of neo-liberal globalization’, as Smith (2005:240) terms it. Transnational families, in fact, have been a constant feature in history, but they have now become more diverse and involve more people in modern life.

Nonetheless, Bryceson (2002) still questions what has made transnational families from the 1990s onwards different from the transnational families of the past. This has led to a discussion of the differences between ‘then’ and ‘now’ Smith (2005:240). What seems to differentiate families of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from those of the 1990s onwards is their diversity and simultaneity of transnational relations. The simultaneity of the family relationships has seen a change due to the communication and frequency of travel (Madianou and Miller, 2011). Baldassar and Merla (2014a:33), for example, argue that ‘with the increased mobility and improvements in both travel and communication technologies, more

and more people are experiencing transnational family lives', by gradually engaging in more regular and instantaneous long-distance interactions.

While it is plausible to think that more people are experiencing transnational family life and their relationships are becoming more simultaneous due to the advances in communication technologies and fast transportation, I argue that such thinking should not be taken for granted. Exactly how it has happened and marked a difference on the lived experiences of transnational families should be the subject of empirical questioning. My study, then, takes into account that transnational family relationships do not necessarily start with access to advanced means of communication and transport. In fact, my study looks at the construction of transnational family life by Brazilian women in the UK with their family members in Brazil as an open empirical question.

Moreover, my study aims to show that it is important to acknowledge that not all migrants and non-migrants take part in transnational family life and they do not necessarily do it all the time or to the same degree. In fact, the level of interactions can fluctuate throughout their life-course and between different family members. Scholars on transnational families have stressed that transnational family practices are not equally divided among family members and, in fact, they remain strongly the women's responsibility (Bailey and Giralt, 2011; Olwig, 2003). Thus, in order to better understand transnational families, my study turns to feminist studies approaches to migration.

## **2. Feminist migration studies and transnational families**

Feminist studies of the 1970s and 1980s strongly challenged the image of the nuclear family model which considered men as the main breadwinner and women as the main source of care (for children and the elderly) in the private space of household. An important feminist critic, Benston (1972), questioned the nuclear family model. She considered it as an ideological model crucial to the maintenance of capitalism inasmuch as women were exploited as a source of unpaid care labour in the home. Moreover, feminist studies such as that of Barrett and McIntosh (1982) have drawn attention to the ideological separation of the nuclear family model, in which women belong to the private and men to the public sphere. By demonstrating the duality in constructing male and female gender roles, some feminist scholars have pointed out that women were excluded from the public sphere on the basis of their reproductive responsibilities and care within the private sphere of the family (Thorne and Yalom, 1982; Abel and Nelson, 1990). Such feminist ideas have challenged the nuclear family model view and advocated that it was a problematic way to conceptualize family life, which led to the

invisibility of women's experiences. Influenced by the broader feminist debates of the period, some feminist scholars started to rethink the role of women in migration. According to Hondagneu-Sotelo (2003), this corresponds to the first stage of feminism and migration. The work of Morokvasic (1984), *Birds of passage are also women*, was pioneering in opening up the discussion on women's migrant experiences.

According to Morokvasic (1984:890), migration studies up to the mid-1980s tended to be 'male biased' and focused on explaining the movement of people based on the neoclassical macro economy push-pull factors of the labour market (Piore, 1979). She argues that such ways of explaining migration were based on the nuclear family model. As women's labour activities inside the house were not paid, migration studies did not give much attention to their experiences. So the assumption that women were not part of the labour market caused their movement and lived experiences to be underestimated and understudied. According to Boyd and Grieco (2003:5):

[...] the neoclassical economic models and the push-pull demographic models of the 1970s and 1980s [saw] migration [...] as the outcome of individual decisions. The responsibilities of women as wives and mothers (and the role of men as breadwinners) were thought to influence the decisions of women. These gendered responsibilities were believed to explain why women were less likely than men to participate in migration decisions or in the labor force of the host country when they did join their husbands.

Morokvasic's (1984) work was pioneering in calling for attention to women's experiences in migration. She claimed that migration should not be explained by economic factors only, but should also include non-economic factors, such as divorce, love, wedlock, family relationships, domestic violence, and broken relationships. These were elements that were important in leading people, especially women, to migrate and that marked women's experiences in migration. Her proposition provided the first steps to explore women and family relationships in the context of migration.

According to Hondagneu-Sotelo (2003), at this time the scholars' main concern was discontinuing the classical nuclear family explanation of migration focusing on the nuclear family model and calling for the study of the neglected women's experiences in migration (see Morokvasic, 1984; Boyd, 1989; Donato, 1992; Pedraza, 1991). Subsequently, a lot of attention was given to women's migration experiences, leading to what Hondagneu-Sotelo (2003) called the second stage of feminism and migration.

This scholar argues that the second stage of the literature on feminism and migration started in the late 1980s and early 1990s. She terms it the gender and migration phase. Boyd and Grieco (2003) note that at this stage the literature on female migration unfolded and generally focused on two broad aspects: one examining the transformation of the position/status of migrant women within their families (especially in relation to their husband) and the other showing the impact on migrant women in moving from one patriarchal system to another. In the Brazilian migration literature these frameworks have been widely used in studies focusing on Brazilian women in the US (McDonnell and de Lourenço, 2008, 2009; DeBiaggi, 2002; Assis, 2007). DeBiaggi (2002), for example, looks at how Brazilian women's acculturation and assimilation in the US made them question the pre-established Brazilian patterns of household labour division.

According to Parreñas (2009:5) studies on women's migration in that period tended to conclude that migration could result in a supposed 'greater gender egalitarianism' between men and women. She suggests that it is possible to observe enthusiasm for the idea that the combination of women and migration could lead to liberation from the notion of 'traditional' family roles and/or reproductive labour. Female migration was presented as having an emancipatory character, giving the possibility for increasing women's social mobility and economic independence and leading to relative autonomy. Parreñas (2001b, 2002, 2005) challenges such approaches by showing that women continue to do reproductive labour even in migration and still have strong family responsibilities. In the same vein, Boyd and Grieco (2003:23) argue that female migration does not necessarily free women from reproductive labour of care inside or outside the home:

[...] new economic and social responsibilities may change the distribution of power within the family, leading to greater authority and participation in household decision making and control over the family's resources. However, participation in the labour force does not automatically improve equality between a migrant and her husband (Boyd and Grieco, 2003:23).

Therefore, these authors suggest that women migrants are still not free of the reproductive labour of caring for others. In order to make a convincing argument in this direction, feminist scholars on migration in the late 1990s and 2000s started to draw attention to how women migrants tended to migrate to provide care, love, and kin-work. This led to the emergence of the care approach in migration studies. Thus, according to Hondagneu-Sotelo (2003), feminist studies on migration started the third stage. In this stage, feminist studies on migration got more closely interrelated with the transnational debates, contributing to a greater

focus on transnational family life.

### *The emergence of the care approach in migration*

According to Hondagneu-Sotelo (2003) and Pessar and Mahler (2003) feminism and migration in the late 1990s entered a third stage which aimed to go beyond the second stage by situating gender and women in broader geographic and social scales, and going beyond the idea that migration could liberate women from the reproductive labour of care (paid or non-paid). This, then, established a dialogue with the transnational approach. The first studies to take this perspective into account were the work of Hochschild (2000), Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2002) and Parreñas (2001b, 2002, 2005) on the ‘global care chain’. According to Baldassar and Merla (2014b:27) ‘prior to this work, the literature on care had not taken internationalisation into consideration’.

The global care chain literature conceptualizes the idea that care has travelled from the global south to the global north in a chain that involves a number of women. The chain starts with a professional ‘native’ white woman, usually from the high and/or middle class, entering the workforce. Her entry into the labour market occurs because she can hire a migrant woman to care for her dependants (including children and elderly parents). On the other side of the chain, the migrant women are only able to migrate because other women (who may or may not be financially compensated) can take care of the migrants’ dependants. This perspective departs from a macro-structure approach to explain that the global political economy inequalities ‘drained’ care, love and kin-work from the south to the northern countries, and women migrants were not liberated from care work, but migrated to provide care. The global care chain approach highlights that the globally structured inequalities cause the emotional cost of mother-child separation and the commodification of emotion (Hochschild, 2000, 2002; Yeates, 2009).

While this approach has opened up the discussion on kin-work, care, love, emotions and gender inequalities in a transnational migration context, it draws conceptually on globalization scholarship. Consequently, it has a unidirectional way of conceptualizing care, love and kin-work as ‘flowing’ from the south to the north and remittances ‘flowing’ from the north to the south. Hence, in the global care chain perspective, migration is seen as involving displacement or diversion of women’s love, care, and kin-work. Hochschild (2000, 2002) has termed this displacement of love as a ‘care drain’, drawing an analogy with the term ‘brain drain’, widely used in the mainstream literature on migration, as a consequence of globalization (Castles and Miller, 2009). This approach has been criticized for focusing exclusively on

labour migrant women from certain southern countries, particularly the Philippines, who tend to move under pre-established contracts to carry out domestic work, and largely portraying them as ‘helpless victims of the global economy’ (Erel, 2012: 23).

As shown previously, some transnational migration studies have criticized those macro-analytic conceptualizations of transnational migration (Smith, 2005; Ley, 2004; Knowles, 2003, Knowles and Harper, 2009; Conradson and Lathan, 2005). Among their critiques is the fact that macro explanations have paid little attention to the actual diversity of migrant experiences. These migration studies argue that there is a need to go beyond just looking at labour, asylum seekers, undocumented and economic migrants or highly-skilled, cosmopolitan, elite migrants. The migration experiences of the last group are usually less researched as Knowles and Harper (2009:7) point out that it is ‘suspected of creating only minimal disruption to migrants’ lives’, while the first group is keenly studied because they are portrayed as ‘those fleeing famine, war, human rights violations, and disaster to live in economically developed countries’. Such differentiation has left out of the studies on transnational migration the diversity of migrants’ lived experiences and even disregards the agency of these groups, framing them as ‘helpless victims’ according to Erel (2012).

As Conradson and Lathan (2005), Amit (2007), Knowles and Harper (2009), and Clarke (2005) have argued, transnational migration studies have focused too much attention on migrants in North America or European countries from the poorer countries of Central America and the Caribbean, or Asian nations such as the Philippines (as is the case with the global care chain approach). Consequently, transnational migration studies have to some extent become a way to describe only these migrant experiences. Although their experiences are undoubtedly important, these scholars would argue that they do not exhaust the scope of the migrants’ experiences.

By acknowledging the diversification in migration, beyond elite skilled transient workers and economic labour migrants, a growing body of literature is considering migration in terms of ‘middling transnationals’ (Conradson and Lathan, 2005). This focuses on the transnational practices of social actors who occupy more or less a middle-class position in their country of origin and also take part in transnational migration. This perspective has led to an important shift in the ways of researching and thinking about transnational migrant experiences. Conradson and Lathan (2005) called for greater attention to the everyday practices of migrants and to include as Knowles and Harper (2009:7) said ‘ordinary workers, expatriates, gap year students, pensioners, and temporary and long-term lifestyle migrants’.

In the same vein, scholars such as Olwig (2014), Fresnoza-Flot (2014), Kilkey (2014),



Baldassar et al. (2007), Baldassar and Wilding (2014), Bonizzoni and Boccagni (2014) and Boccagni (2012), who focus their attention on transnational families, argue that in order to understand family relationships constructed over a distance there is a need to look beyond the global care chain perspective and consider the diversity of transnational family relationships. This involves looking beyond the dyadic mother and children relationships from the south to the north. They thus propose empirical studies to understand family relationships which should include family relationships developed over a distance by low, middle or high classes with their elderly parents, extended family relations of care, mothering, fathering, and siblings. Their approach is to view care as ‘circulating in different directions’ (Baldassar and Merla, 2014:44) and among the various family members. Moreover, these studies state that transnational family members are located in particular places at particular times, and their transnational practices are variously affected by their ‘territorialisation’ (Kilkey and Merla, 2014).

To summarize, the feminist debates on women’s migration have contributed to my study by shedding light on women’s experiences in the migration context as protagonists of their migration. Moreover, the debates of the second and third stages of feminism and migration also helped with the understanding that migration does not necessarily liberate women from reproductive labour, care responsibilities, kin-work and family relationships. This discussion was important to my study in exploring empirically to what extent the Brazilian women participants have continued their family relationships at a distance, their reasons for doing so, and paying attention to which of the non-migrant family members took more part in the transnational family practices.

Although feminism and migration studies contributed to this study in terms of thinking about women’s migrant experiences, I noted that transnational family studies also dialogued with family studies, particularly British family studies. In the following section, I explore the debates on family studies from the 1990s and some ideas and concepts such as ‘family practices’ and ‘doing family’ which contributed conceptually to the empirical analysis of this thesis.

### **3. Family studies and transnational families**

In the 1990s, Giddens (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) ‘individualization’ and ‘de-traditionalization’ theses became highly influential in explaining major changes to the family. They departed from a macro-structure and theoretical explanations to elucidate the

major changes and diversity of family forms from the mid-twentieth century onwards – including same-sex couples, single-parent families, post-divorce families and the increase in families living far apart. The increase in the number of families living apart, and particularly female migration, based on Giddens' (1992) argument, for example, could be understood as a response to and feature of the new opportunities created by the 'de-traditionalization' of family life. Giddens notes that intimate relationships have become more a matter of personal choice than duty or expectations. People expect equality, sharing and companionship, satisfaction and self-fulfilment. He sees these elements as the core of his theoretical conceptualization of the pure-relationship<sup>14</sup>, in which less rigid gender roles have emerged as a result of more flexible and egalitarian relationships. Thus, for this author, we are progressing to a positive improvement of intimate relationships. He states that due to the freedom from 'traditional' and bound chains of expectations and obligations, family relationships have gained in terms of democracy and equality among their members. He suggests that family relationships, then, have become more fluid (as also affirmed by Bauman, 2003) and organized by the labour market, educational system demands and consumerism.

Scholars such as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) articulate a similar picture, suggesting that the 'Second Modernity' period of the mid-twentieth century has replaced the old predictabilities and certainties of industrial society. In fact, it has brought with it new risks and opportunities, creating paradox and ambiguity in society and people's family lives. Beck-Gernsheim (2002) emphasizes that, in the last few decades, changes in education and at work as well as in the family, the legal system, and so on, have established changes in what counts as a 'normal' female biography. As a result, more and more women have been at least partially released from the ties of the family; 'they can expect less and less to be provided for by a husband, and are forced to become – often inconsistently, of course – independent and self-supporting' (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:56). Such opportunity makes them experience the demands and pressures of a 'life of their own' (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:57). This 'life of their own' does not involve guidelines based on class divisions, religious statements and traditions to be followed; rather, it is the labour market, the welfare state, the educational system, and the juridical system that will determine people's actions. As these systems do not produce clear guidelines, the individuals have to define their own lifestyles. So, life is no longer a matter of destiny, but of individual choices.

Unlike Giddens (1992), who believes that the 'de-traditionalization' of family

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<sup>14</sup> For more about this concept, see Giddens (1992).

relationships could lead us to a more democratic and equal family life, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) have a more pessimistic view. They argue that the new life experiments are risky since they are often characterized by temporary and transient relationships. Beck-Gernsheim (2002) stresses that a high value is given to personal autonomy in 'Later Modernity', which may not incorporate any consensus on values, and can produce intimate relationships characterized as fragile and impermanent, and likely to be jeopardized by inherent uncertainties, risks and anxieties. According to these authors, although individuals now have more personal choice in deciding how to shape their lives, relationships have become thinner, more fragile and more temporary. So, on the one hand, men and women are freer from 'traditional' constraints and predefined roles, but on the other hand, it has made the social ties weak.

Scholars such as Smart (2007), Morgan (1996; 2011a; 2011b), Finch and Manson (1993), Finch (2007), Jamieson (1998), Duncan and Smith (2006) and Chambers (2012) are among a number of authors who have criticized the individualist (de-traditionalist) approach to family life. They argue that this approach, like other macro theories, appears somewhat abstracted and distant from the ground of everyday lives of families. They also state that those perspectives are exaggerated in relation to individual rational choices. So, by viewing people's actions as the outcome of personal choices, Giddens (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) disregard the relational side of social actions, and gender, social class, intergenerational obligations, roles, and other relevant constraints significant in family life. According to Smart (2007:20) their world is empty of mothers, daughters, fathers, siblings, uncles, aunts and so on. She argues: 'when people talk about their lives they talk in a relational way of "my mother", "my partner", "my grandmother". Thus, people's choices are not "free-floating do it yourself", as referred to by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim as well as Giddens' (Smart, 2007:21).

In addition, for Chambers (2012), the stress on individual choices assumes equality between men and women. However, she argues that, as feminist scholarship shows, there still exists an assumption that family life is mainly the responsibility of women, rather than a joint responsibility between men and women. The individualist view also leads to resentment in political and media discourses presupposing that family life in general is being undermined by women who 'choose' to work, inasmuch as children are being uncared for by them and older family members left vulnerable in old age. It has created an image that women's personal autonomy and their apparently successful movement into employment and even into migration is giving women too much choice and they are regarded as self-interested agents.

Even Beck-Gernsheim (2002) in her more recent work shares Chambers' (2012)

observation about gender and intergenerational relationships. She argues that ‘one of the premises of the relationship between the generations is that periods of autonomy and dependence alternate in the human life span’ (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:56). She stresses that during the infant period there is a total reliance upon the support of others; then there is the healthy adult period, in which people can organize their lives more or less independently; and finally there is old age, a period where they are again reliant on the help of others. However, she states ‘of course, that “others” is here a vague and loose term, because what is really meant is not at all gender-neutral. In our society it is above all women who are responsible for support tasks in the relationship between the generations’ (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:56). The presumption that people, particularly women, are making more individual choices and abandoning the work of commitment to family life is in fact being challenged by a growing body of researchers.

In this light, British family studies, such as those of Morgan (1996, 2011 a,b), Smart and Neale (1999), Smart (2007), Finch and Manson (1993) and Finch (2007) have made evident contributions. Their main debate has been about recognizing the diversity and transformations of family forms, configurations and activities as well as revealing the continuing importance of family life as essential to people, and particularly to women, in contemporary society. To highlight the diversity of family forms they have questioned the language of ‘the family’ and have consequently engaged with alternative conceptualizations of family life. Indeed, these scholars have crafted diverse concepts such as: personal life, family of choice, negotiated family responsibilities, moral-commitment and connectedness, and family practices.

What these approaches to family life have in common is their ‘suspicion of abstraction and theory and its endorsement of the practical and of everyday experience’ (Morgan, 2011b: 24). They concentrate on the actual lived experiences of family life, and for the need to talk to people to know about their ways of engaging in family life. Thus, they focus on the idea of social actors and agency, rather than on structures or institutions of the family. They propose engaging with empirical studies to find out how family is ‘done’. I explain these ideas further in the next section.

### ***Ideas and concepts from British family studies***

Indeed, from the 1990s onwards, British family studies established new ways of thinking beyond and in response to the ‘individualization’ thesis, leading to innovative studies

about family relationships. Among several contributions, Morgan (1996)'s concept of 'family practices' appears to be a key idea which has been applied to explain family life. The core of Morgan's family practices approach is the recognition of a disparity between the ideological notion of the nuclear family and the variety of ways in which people actually 'do family life', when they are empirically analysed (Morgan, 2011b). Rather than departing from previous categories such as 'the family' or marriage and parenting, he suggests that we, as social researchers, should look at the multitude of activities done by families. Thus, the family is not a 'thing' or an 'object' in itself, that we should seek in reality, but a way of looking at, describing and understanding people's interactions, which could be otherwise described (Morgan, 2011b:199). Thus, he suggests looking at family life through the perspective of family practices.

Morgan's notion of family practices comprises a sense of action, a sense of family life as a set of activities. The focus on 'doing', on activities, detaches the term 'family' from the household and from the standard model of the family consisting of heterosexual parents and young children. Moreover, it moves family life away from ideas of the family as relatively static structures or sets of positions or statuses. It remembers that adult members of a household themselves have parents and may well have siblings and other family relationships extending, as I will show, 'over the world' (to use Morgan 2011b:74's term). Family actors are not simply persons defined as mothers, fathers and so on but can also be seen as 'doing' family.

The family practices notion developed by Morgan (2011b:06) also takes into account a 'sense of everyday'. It includes both the sense of those life events which are experienced by a significant proportion of any population (bereavement, marriage, birth of children), and, equally, those activities which seem unremarkable, or hardly worth talking about. His concentration on the 'everyday sense' serves as a reminder that family practices are not simply the constructions of an external observer. As I showed regarding the 'everyday turn' in transnational migration, Morgan (2011b:06) also calls for a sense of the everyday in studying family life. This use of the 'everyday sense' to analyse family life has been important conceptually and methodologically. It helps to search for what is important to people in their 'doing family' life.

Family practices also comprise a 'sense of the regular'. The regularities may be daily, weekly, monthly or annual, or to mark life-course events, and they can be peculiar to members of a particular family or set of family members. Morgan (2011b:07) argues that family practices comprise a 'sense of fluidity' too. This sense is considered important in understanding the

boundaries that are set for family activities, in the sense of who is included or excluded is flexible. Thus, who counts as family depends in part on who is asking the question and the circumstances of the question (a researcher, a neighbour, a social worker). Thus, in studying family practices it is important to have in mind that the outcomes of the study are a co-produced process of the relationship between the researcher and participants, which is a point I discuss further in Chapter 3. In addition, Morgan (2011b:07) states that it is important to acknowledge that any sets of family practices, which can be described as family practices, could also be named in other ways, for example: family rituals, family gatherings, and so on. The importance of understanding these under the idea of family practices is to recognize their dynamic aspects in the construction and reconstruction of family life. Finally, Morgan states that 'family practices' also comprise a link to history and biography. This is in part a recognition that individuals do not start from scratch as they go about family living. They 'do' a set of family practices, which are already partially shaped by 'legal prescriptions, economic and moral constraints and cultural definitions' historically and biographically constructed (Morgan, 2011b:07). In this sense the idea of 'family practices' means understanding family life as a set of processes rather than a fixed external structure. These six elements convey Morgan's key implications about 'family practices'.

The author argues however that the idea of family practices, stressing doing and in some measure agency in family life could be criticized. He says that one understanding of the term 'practices' can be comprehended as habit or habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). This notion, according to Morgan (2011b:30) can imply an 'unreflexive participation in traditions and practices, which are not obviously owned by the actors and where any sense of agency seems, at best, muted'. He states that this perception of 'family practices' as 'habit or habitus' is misleading, as it can lead back strongly, even deterministically, towards the social structure discussion. The author argues that other critiques can emerge regarding continuities within family relationships or regarding a set of constraints of resources available to family members. For example, their engagement in employment, education or other spheres of life which can influence their capacity and/or opportunity to practise family. Those critiques, he argues, in fact only reinforce the argument that family practices are not conducted in a vacuum (Morgan, 2011b:30)

Moreover, the author notes that another possible criticism of the family practices approach includes the notion of discourses. Morgan (2011b:68) argues that 'if we take the stronger notion of discourse (the one identified with Foucault, 1980), which represents a particular combination of knowledge and power', we would tend to focus more on 'what is

told', and try to measure it against 'what is done'. To make such a distinction and focus on it, although methodological awareness and reflexivity is important, can lead to notions of 'dysfunctional' families or broken families. It could lead to making a rigid distinction between the 'family we live with' and the 'family we live by' (Gillis, 1996), or 'what is said' and 'what is done' as a family (Morgan, 2011b:68). It could lead to the idea that there exists an 'ideal family' or a core model of family to be found. In fact, the families 'we live with' and the families 'we live by' are mutually implicated in each other (Morgan, 2011b; Gillis, 1996; Cheal, 2002; 2008). Further, as Morgan (2011b:30) argues, discourses are not produced in a vacuum. They themselves draw upon practices. Therefore, by focusing on what people say is also a way to focus on what they 'do', and the 'doing' is what they say they do. It can vary depending on to whom and in what circumstances they are saying it. Both terms 'do' and 'say' are going to be used in this thesis. It is important to bear in mind 'the idea that family is something that people "do" and in doing create and recreate the idea of family' (Morgan, 2011b:177). As Knowles (2003:55) says:

I have already noted that while life and narrative, living and telling, are not the same thing, they are intricately connected in that telling becomes part of living and living becomes part of telling.

Morgan's argument for interpreting family life through family practices was used by Smart and Neale's study (1999) of post-divorce parenthood. It was important for them to emphasize parenting arrangements beyond a 'social problem', and show that connectedness continues in this family form. They combined the family practices approach with Finch and Mason's emphasis on negotiation (1993). By doing this, they emphasized that family practices can be created and/or recreated, repeated, continued or maintained, because people's family life is not compounded of rigid 'traditional' roles and rules. Finch and Manson (1993) argue that although family 'traditions', responsibilities, obligations and expectations still make sense and are part of people's living in contemporary times, people negotiate them in their everyday lives. Thus, family practices are not reproduced in a rigid exact same way. They are continually subject to change over the life-course, which does not mean their importance is diminished. Later, Smart (2007:189) conceptualized that in the turn to look at family practices, further importance was given to supporting the 'connectedness thesis'. She argues against the 'individualization' approach of family life, stating:

With [individualization], one is directed towards gathering information and evidence about fragmentation, differentiation, separation and autonomy. And it also becomes a mindset or inferential framework through which information is interpreted. Connectedness as a

mindset encourages enquiry about all kinds of sociality and seeks to understand how association remains both possible and desirable as well as how it takes many different shapes at different times (Smart, 2007:189).

The family practices (Morgan, 2011b) notion was a relevant notion for my study. Family life in the perspective of family practices does not necessarily need to take place in locations that have a strong identification with the family, such as 'homes' or 'households'. It is advocated that family life should be understood as the set of activities that people practise as family, so clearly the family can be constituted at a distance. Moreover, the notion of having the 'mindset on connection' (Smart, 2007:189) rather than on separation and/or fragmentation provided by the family practice perspective also helped my study in thinking about family life away from the institutional and ideological notion that a family living apart would represent a breaking of family relationships. In this vein, the concept of family practices helped my study in establishing cues for the investigation of family life 'done' by the Brazilian women transnationally.

While British family ideas and concepts have helped in the understanding of family life at a distance, they have stayed local, based on face-to-face relationships. Transnational family studies thus have used British family studies conceptually, and then searched for elements that could empirically prove the continuity and connectedness of family ties at a distance. Some authors, such as Heath et al. (2011), Botterill (2014), Reynolds and Zontini (2014), Bonizzoni and Boccagni (2014), Boccagni (2012; 2014), Baldassar and Merla (2014a) have mentioned Morgan (2011b)'s work. They argue that it is only by searching for what people 'do' as families that it is possible to understand how family life actually continues at a distance. I now turn to identify the most used analytical toolkit to understand how transnational families are done at a distance - the care approach.

#### **4. The care analytical approach to the transnational family**

As I have said previously in this literature review chapter, the first studies on transnational family lives tended to document the mothers moving away from their own children in the global south to offer care for children and families of the global north. This dyadic relationship was mapped with diverse migrant groups, constituted mainly by children who were left behind in the south (for example, in Latin America, particularly Central America, and Asian countries, principally the Philippines) and mothers who migrated to the north, to countries such as the United States and Western European countries. The principal questions these scholars were trying to answer were: how do migrant women deal with motherhood, and



what are the effects on the left-behind children? In fact, these first studies on the transnational families mainly focused on the activities of sending remittances and goods from north to south, and the sending of love and care from south to north. As previously mentioned, they paved the way to transnational family life being mainly analysed under the ‘care approach’ perspective. This became the main analytical toolkit used in various empirical studies (see for examples: Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1997; Parreñas, 2001a, 2001b; Boyle et al., 2002; Hewett, 2009; Pedone and Araujo, 2008; Fresnoza-Flot, 2009).

The studies on transnational family lives in recent years, as I have shown, have expanded to dialogue with the more recent transnational approach and have even drawn on ideas and concepts of family studies. As Olwig (2014) argues, empirical studies from the mid-2000s onwards started to diversify their focus of analysis beyond the mother and children relationships at a distance, the notion of the global care chain and the division of researching the ‘helpless’ labour migrants of the south on the one side and the high elites on the other. For example, authors such as Baldassar et al. (2007) and Izuhara (2010a, 2010b) focused on transnational family practices of care provided by middle-class migrant adult-children living in Perth, Western Australia to their elderly parents’ back home in Italy, Ireland, the Netherlands, Singapore, New Zealand and Iran. Izuhara did her fieldwork on the transnational family care practices of Japanese women living in the UK and caring for their elderly parents in Japan.

Baldassar et al.’s (2007) work aimed to map the transnational family practices of care exchange by the groups mentioned above based on the care perspective developed by Finch (1989), with five types of caregiving, including economic, accommodation, personal (hands-on), practical, childcare, and emotional and moral support, analysing how these forms of care were practised by those groups from a distance. In addition, their approach to transnational family practices focusing on care exchange at a distance made use of Finch and Manson’s (1993) argument that care depends on ‘normative obligation’ and ‘negotiated commitment’.

[The] normative obligation to care is based on notions of duty and responsibility, supposedly at the core of family relations and frequently defined by policymakers as part of the moral fabric of society that everyone should adhere to. Finch, however, argues that the actual support given to family members is not the outcome of what is the “proper thing to do morally” but of “working it out”, that is, negotiated commitments (Finch and Manson, [1993] Chapter 3) (Baldassar et al., 2007:15).

They use these notions but add to the idea of ‘normative obligation’ and ‘negotiated commitment’ the idea of the capacity or opportunity to practise care among family members at

a distance. By capacity, these authors mean ‘a myriad of issues that encompass an individual’s opportunity and ability to engage in practices of transnational caregiving’ (Baldassar et al., 2007: 204). They give some examples of things that could constrain the capacity to participate in transnational family caregiving.

[...] “macro” structural factors, including migration policy and visa restrictions, employment policies, access to travel and telecommunication technologies, international relations between home and host countries and the political stability and safety of relevant nations. [...] “meso” or community factors, including the availability of local support and associations as well as the welfare services and infrastructure. Finally, there are a number of “micro” personal factors, in particular, available resources, including finances, employment status, language, health and time, but also willingness to allocate these resources to care exchanges and the perceptions of risk, safety and the effectiveness of caregivers.

In a more recent work, Baldassar and Merla (2014) expanded the idea of ‘care exchange and giving’ at a distance to a perspective of ‘care circulation’. In this framework, they identify that practising care from a distance is reciprocal, multidirectional and asymmetrical. In fact, they claim that the transnational family practice of care can fluctuate over the life course with transnational family networks and can be subjected to the political, economic, cultural and social contexts of both the sending and receiving societies. Rather than building on the empirical dyadic relationship of the migrant mother and left-behind children, or elderly parents and migrant adult-children, they argue that care as family practices circulates among different family members – not only women, but also men, children, extended family members and others along the life course. Olwig (2014) illustrates this well in her study of Caribbean families. In addition, they highlight, along with Madianou and Miller (2011, 2012), that family members practise care through the virtual world of new technologies. Therefore, their perspectives of care circulation serve to question and broaden any belief that transnational family practices such as care should be understood as geographically located, and even as unidirectional from south to north (Baldassar and Wilding, 2014).

The authors assert that the ‘care circulation’ approach recognizes how transnational families actively and effectively manage distance and separation. But they emphasize that this is not to suggest that ‘virtual forms of caregiving can easily be equated with proximate forms’, and they also highlight that they are not advocating that ‘governments can abandon their responsibilities to support reunification of migrant family members’ (Baldassar and Merla, 2014a:22). Thus, they argue that the constraints and difficulties involved, where it is time-consuming, expensive, painful or heart-rending, also constitute the transnational family

practice of care across distance. They state that the ‘care circulation’ approach to transnational family relationships can shed light on how transnational families maintain their ties from a distance.

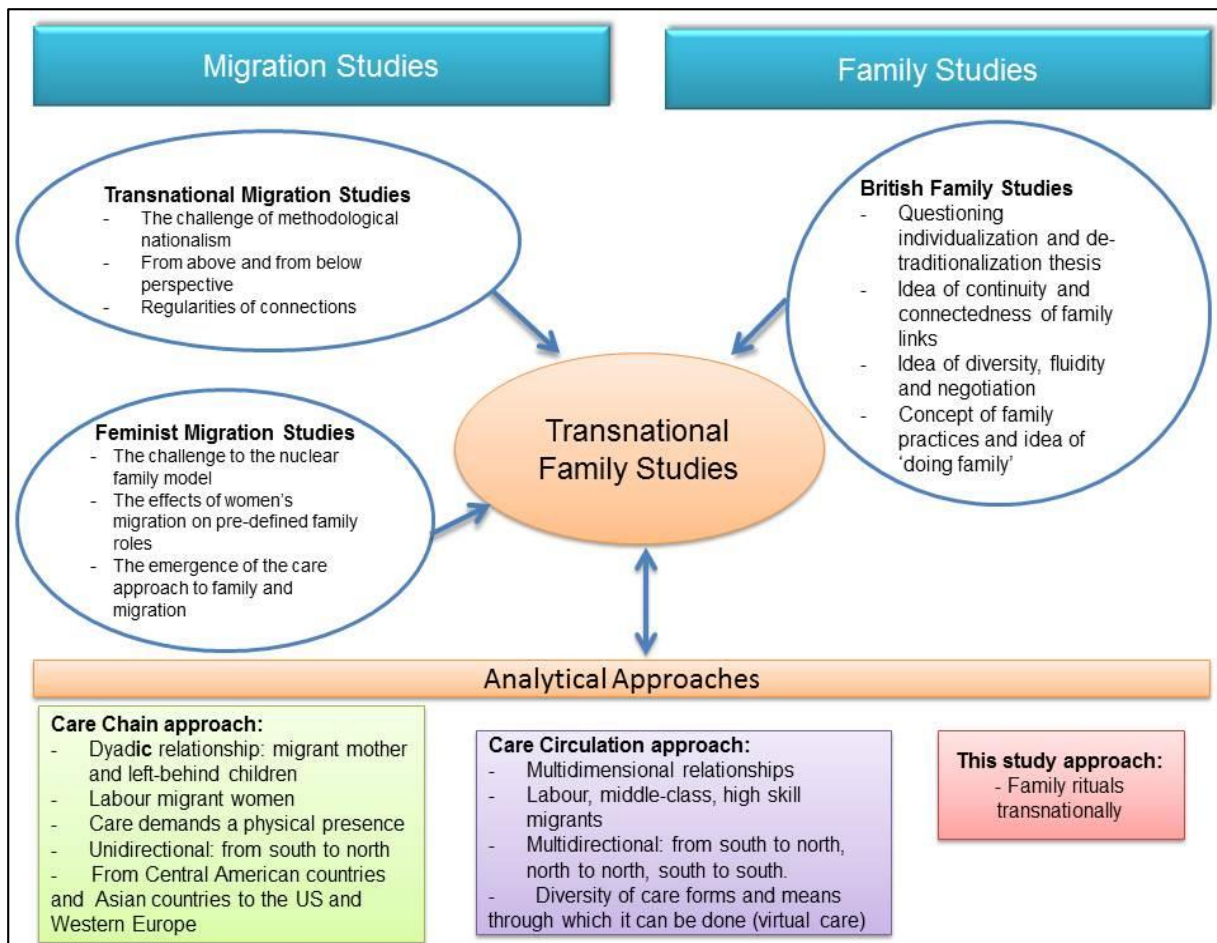
This thesis recognizes the analytical power of the care approach to understand transnational family practices empirically, particularly Baldassar et al.’s (2007), analytical toolkit based on Finch’s (1989) five types of care (emotional/moral, financial, practical, accommodation and personal) and the notion of ‘care circulation’ among transnational family members. The care approach has inspired several empirical studies on transnational family life, for example: Wall and Bolzman (2014), on Brazilian, Ukrainian and Cape Verdean migrant families living in Switzerland and Portugal; Boccagni (2012) and Bonizzoni and Boccagni (2014), on transnational care practices of Ecuadorian families in Italy; Olwig (2014) and Coe (2008), on the diverse forms of care practices of Caribbean and Ghanaian families respectively; Fresnoza-Flot (2014), on men’s caregiving practices in Filipino transnational families; Kilkey (2014), on Polish fathers in London and transnational care; and Reynolds and Zontini (2014b), on care practices among Italian and Caribbean families in Britain. Nonetheless, the Brazilian migrant women in the UK, of this study, and their family members in Brazil stressed a set of family practices as being important to their constitution of family at a distance, which do not necessarily fit into the care types (Baldassar et al., 2007). Thus, I faced several questions: how could I analyse the set of family practices that the Brazilian migrant women narrated for me? How could I frame them? How would I organize and present these sets of activities? What did they have in common?

I turned to the literature of family studies once again and noticed that the sets of activities they were narrating had been framed as family practices, such as the care ones, but Morgan (2011b) identified them as family rituals such as: family meals, family birthdays, births, weddings and funerals. Thus, in order to understand the family practices that my empirical data were showing as important to the constitution and reconstitution of their family life at a distance, I turned to the literature on family rituals. This leads to the final part of this literature review, where I show how the theoretical insights of the literature on family rituals contributes to this thesis to understand the family practices that the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil narrated as connecting them and creating and recreating their sense of familyhood.

Figure 2.1 summarizes the ideas and concepts from migration and family studies which I identified as influencing transnational family studies. It also locates in this figure what I believe is the main contribution of this thesis – to understand that family rituals can be a set of

family practices done transnationally which are important to the constitution and reconstitution of transnational family lives and the sense of familyhood at a distance.

**Figure 2.1: Locating transnational family studies**



Source: Self-elaboration

## 5. Rituals, ritualization and family rituals

### *Introducing ritual studies*

Ritual studies, in general, offer a number of relevant insights into the study of family rituals. As rituals is a category largely studied, scholars have usually tried to explain it as composed of different, but complementary, approaches. They are usually framed as: functional, cultural/semiotic, performative and practice (see Bell, 1992, 1997; Grimes, 2014; Segalen, 1999; Peirano, 2002, 2003; Baxter and Braithwaite, 2006; Couldry, 2003).

Historically, according to Bell (1992, 1997) and Grimes (2014) the study of rituals first emerged during the late nineteenth century. The early studies tended to see rituals as a social category, and aimed to understand the origin of rituals and their function in society. Peirano (2002) states that at that time, ritual studies were largely confined to magical and religious procedures (see for examples the studies of Smith, 1972 [1894]; Tylor, 2016 [1871]; Frazer, 1955 [1911], and later, Durkheim, 2002 [1912]; Hubert and Mauss, 1964 [1898]; Radcliff-Brown, 1964 [1922]; and Malinowski, 2005 [1922]). Rituals were framed under the functional approach which asks the question: ‘What are the functions of ritual for the individual and the social group?’ (Baxter and Braithwaite, 2006: 262). For those authors, Durkheim’s (2002 [1912]) discussion of rituals, which focuses on religion and religious rites, emphasizes the social function of rituals to express collective representations and to understand how individuals are connected to society.

Peirano (2002) argues that in his classic book *‘The elementary forms of religious life’* (2002 [1912]) Durkheim intends to deconstruct the premises that link religious rituals with the ideas of Tylor and Frazer (1955 [1911]) on magic, animism and the supernatural. She states that he refuses to see the origin of religious rituals as centred on beliefs in spiritual beings, which did not follow from society. For her, Durkheim has a more sociological view than Tylor and Frazer. He argues that rituals can produce ideas and values that, once socially shared, can assume a religious connotation. Thus, religion, and religious rituals, for Durkheim is not related to gods and the supernatural, but is connected with society (Peirano, 2002). In fact, religious rituals occur in the effervescence of the multitude, and their symbolic communication is essential to society. The author departs from the premise that no society can be held together without that symbolic communication provided by rituals.

Although Durkheim’s religion and ritual perspective on finding general and non-historical laws has been criticized in the social sciences, according to Couldry (2003) his thoughts elaborated in *‘The elementary forms of religious life’* still challenge the sociological imagination of contemporary researchers, particularly the importance he attaches to the symbolic and meaning dimension of social relationships. This has influenced and continued to impact studies on rituals, particularly his notions of the ‘profane’ and ‘sacred’. Grimes (2014), for example, argues that for Durkheim, the sacred has an entirely distinct nature from the profane, yet these are not two incongruous worlds, they are able to communicate with each other. The rituals and ritualistic objects (totems) would have the function of mediating and approximating these antagonistic poles. For example: objects in which the sacred is embedded are banal – an animal, a vegetable, a piece of wood and so on – therefore, a process of symbolic

transmutation is needed (a ritual) on a simple object for it to acquire the ability to ‘overcome the profane’ and become a totem, giving it a value previously not recognized.

Durkheim’s sociological approach would stimulate many more perceptions with regard to both religion and ritual, for example, Hubert and Mauss’s (1964 [1898]) notion of religion and ritual. According to Peirano (2003:13), these authors stressed the importance of studying religion and rituals as a ‘total social fact’. It should be analysed taking into account that it is linked to every aspect of society. In an earlier study of the ancient Vedic tradition of ritual sacrifice in India, Hubert and Mauss (1964 [1898]) described the structure of the sacrifice ritual, and they affirmed that it was not simply the result of the experience of effervescence (as Durkheim affirmed). In fact, the authors were interested in the efficacy of the ritual, not the materiality of the efficacy, but the ways by which the efficacy was conceived. The efficacy attributed to the ritual was represented as *sui generis*, because it was considered to come from ‘special’ forces, which the ritual would have the property to trigger. The ritual, then, lies in the act of believing in its effect, through the practices of symbolization. Such notions of ‘profane and sacred’ or the efficacy of an object (totem) were relevant to my analysis of some of the transnational family practices that the participants of this study mentioned, such as the writing and receiving of letters. Some participants exalted the ‘sacredness’ and ‘efficacy’ of the letters that they received from their family members and how they become a ‘totem’ (see Chapter 4).

Following these thoughts, Grimes (2014), Peirano (2002) and Segalen (1999) affirmed that Malinowski (2005 [1922]) and Radcliffe-Brown (1964 [1922]) further developed the functional approach begun by Durkheim. While Radcliffe-Brown continued Durkheim’s focus on the functions of ritual for the social group, Malinowski analysed patterns of exchange, via his ethnography of the Trobriand Islands. He emphasized how rituals served to alleviate a person’s anxiety, fears, or doubts. These two last scholars, in line with Durkheim’s argument, viewed ritual as a way to regulate and stabilize an individual or a social system, and then restore a state of harmony after disruption. Thereby, the ritual helped to maintain the equilibrium of society. By that time, according to Peirano (2002:23) a range of studies (from ecological, ethnological, biogenetic and psychological perspectives) had taken, if not all, at least a partial functionalist explanation of what ritual does to society (see Rappaport, 1967; Harris, 1977; Huxley, 1966). However, Baxter and Braithwaite (2006) said they rejected any historical treatment of religion and rituals and they were totally in favour of a functional-structural analysis.

According to Bell (1997), Peirano (2002) and Segalen (1999) the classic work of Van Gennep (1965 [1909]) extended the debate of rituals beyond religious and magical matters. He

stated that rituals are also part of mundane life. He considered life-cycle, seasonal and calendrical events as rites of passage. This author's notion of ritual influenced ideas about family rituals (Baxter and Braithwaite, 2006). Van Gennep asserts, like the early functionalists, that societies are characterized by discontinuity, and the rites of passage seek to remake the social order. So, a set of events such as birth, puberty, marriage and death are key moments to keep individuals in connection with their society and/or groups (Peirano, 2002). In his focus on rites of passage, Van Gennep describes the internal organization of ritual activities, which for him are formed by three phases: first, the rites of separation, then the rites of the *limen* or *marge* and finally, the rites of aggregation. According to this author, 'the liminal phase of rituals is when individuals or groups enter into a social state of suspension, separated from their other activities of life, and not yet incorporated into a new state, [...] the function of this phase is to reduce the tensions and disturbing effects of change' (Peirano, 2003:16<sup>15</sup>). I go back to his notion of ritual in the final empirical chapter of this study in which I highlight how the Brazilian transnational families studied here practised life cycle rituals, such as marriage, the birth of child, and funerals with their family members in Brazil. I gained analytical inspiration from Van Gennep's and Turner's (1969) phases of rituals to explain how the group in this study practised those rituals.

Although Van Gennep had already suggested that an association between rituals and religion was not mandatory, according to Bell (1992) it was Gluckman's (1971) view of rituals and later Turner (1967) that expanded ideas about rituals further away from the Durkheimian concept. The ritual of rebellion was described as socially constructive, as a social action (a catharsis) to avoid real conflict. Gluckman, in his research on South Africa, argues that rituals are important 'release valves' for the social order (Bell, 1992:41). They have the potential to minimize real conflict by sublimating it within ritual performance. Thus, ritual performances are powerful because of their capacity to draw attention to the conflict itself and also the necessity for legitimate authority to contain any disruption of the social order (Peirano, 2002:18). His argument differs from previous authors, as he argues that rituals are social relations and, then, embedded conflict, divisions, and struggles, rather than an experience of unitary solidarity and cohesion. Moreover, according to Bell (1992) like Van Gennep, for Gluckman, ritual is a category of social action, beyond religious and 'sacred' activities. In fact, rituals could refer to a wide spectrum of formalized, but not necessarily religious, activities.

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<sup>15</sup> Translated by the current author into English

Influenced by Van Gennep's work on the phases of ritual and Gluckman's on the ritualization of social conflict, Turner (1957, 1969) developed a powerful analytical model of rituals which has influenced studies on family rituals, as I show below. Turner's fieldwork research was among the *Ndembu*, located in ancient Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). In his book, '*Schism and continuity in an African society*' (1957), Turner emphasized conflicts as the structural basis of Ndembu, in line with Gluckman's arguments. He described the tension that lies between matrilineal descent and virilocal marriage, which is the social structure of Ndembu society (Peirano, 2003:20). Turner (1957:91) identified this tension as a 'social drama', and to correct the balance of matrilineal descent and marriage a ritual has to take place. Rituals are, then, processes of dramatization necessary to resolve the 'social drama'. According to Couldry (2003), it was based on these empirical studies, that Turner (1957, 1967, 1969) developed his model of 'social drama', which served as an instrument of analysis, included even in his later formulations of performance. Drawing on Van Gennep's model of rites of passage, Turner viewed 'social drama' as a dynamic process through which the community renewed itself through the ritual.

According to Van Gennep's model, as described above, rites of passage involve three moments, or sub-rites: (1) separation, (2) transition, and (3) aggregation. In Turner's model of 'social drama', the three moments unfold into four: 1) breach in relations (or rupture), 2) crisis, 3) redressive actions, and 4) acts of reintegration (which can lead to social harmony or not). Turner also went beyond Gluckman's notion of ritual by arguing that, as a 'social drama', rituals do not simply release emotional tensions, but give form to conflicts and the dominant values holding the group together. In fact, for Turner 'ritual dramatizes real situations of the real world' (Bell, 1997:40)

In addition to his view of ritual as 'social drama', Turner (1969, 1974) started to study ritual symbols, which he regarded as the fundamental units of ritual activity. The most well-known example is the study of the milk tree, used in an Ndembu girl's initiation ceremony (Peirano, 2002: 20). Thus, Turner argues that ritual symbols are multivocal, as they exist at many layers of meaning, often oppositional. Such semantic density produces complex systems of meaning, at once contradictory (structured and anti-structured), yet complementary, as a dialectic process, which can lead to the union of the group, and to the notion of 'communitas', and to the concept of liminality, developed in Turner's 'Ritual Process' book (1969). In the liminal moment (a notion proposed by Van Gennep and developed further by Turner) people are momentarily suspended from what they were doing before, and it is possible to have a



deeper insight into the bonds that unite people. It is from the experience of the 'limen', promoted by 'social dramas', that powerful multivocal symbols emerge, and by articulating and weaving the networks of meaning this can unify and overcome tensions in the group. According to Couldry (2003), during the 'limen' experience, feelings and emotions encourage people to feel that they have the same origin, which is recreated socially and symbolically. Thus, in the 'limen', it is possible to experience what Turner (1969) calls *communitas*, which is a type of loose, unstructured sociality or sense of togetherness that prevails in times of crisis, as opposed to *societas* which is the equivalent of formal social organization that prevails in normal conditions.

I return to this idea in the empirical chapters, as some participants' sense of familyhood can be related to this notion of the 'liminal' moment, or 'liminal-like' moments. For Turner, in contemporary 'complex' societies of 'organic solidarity' the process of secularization led to the disappearance of 'liminality', as happens in societies of 'mechanical solidarity'. Yet a sense of the 'liminal' continues in various events and pastimes, with Turner (1982) using the word 'liminoid', and/or 'liminal-like' moments. Schechner (2002) exemplifies these events as being sports events, games, popular entertainment (e.g. a carnival), performance arts, daily life patterns of interactions, birthdays, Christmas celebrations and so on.

According to Baxter and Braithwaite (2006), Couldry (2003) and Bell (1992), like Turner, various contemporary scholars were concerned with aspects of ritual activities and cultural symbols. But some of them had a different form of analysis, affiliated to a more cultural/semiotic approach to rituals. While the scholars leaning to a more functionalist approach were concerned with how rituals function, those scholars leaning more to a cultural/semiotic approach tried to answer the question of what rituals mean. It is important to highlight that there is no clear line between functional-structuralist approaches on the one hand and symbolic-culturalist on the other. In fact, many theories incorporate aspects of both perspectives, as for example: Turner (1969), Levi-Strauss (1963), Douglas (1966), Leach (1966), Geertz (1973) and Bloch (1989), to name the most-cited ones.

According to Bell (1997), Levi-Strauss's distinction between myths and rituals marks an inherent antinomy of the human condition, between two inescapable subjections: the living (action) and the thinking. Rituals are part of the first, as a matter of form, while myths compound the second, as a matter of content. Bell (1997) states that for Levi-Strauss, although rituals possess an implicit mythology, which manifests itself in the exegesis of ritual (as Turner emphasizes), it is not the 'pure state', because it would not have affinity with the language

(here it is possible to see Levi-Strauss's affinity with Saussure's (1966 [1913]) thinking). The myths are connected to thinking, and are superior to rituals in terms of understanding the structure of human thoughts, which is Levi-Strauss's aim. The rituals in Levi-Strauss's conception are relegated to the simple execution of gestures and the manipulation of objects. The very action of ritual, so important to Turner, became only part of the mythology that informed the ritual.

According to Peirano (2002:22), Turner (1969), contrary to Levi-Strauss, argues that rituals are the way to access the structure of societies, while Levi-Strauss emphasizes myth as a way of reaching the structuring foundations of human thought. Turner argues that to study symbols, it is necessary primarily to study symbols in social action. Thus, rituals in Turner's approach are, above all, rituals performed, rituals in action (Couldry, 2003:31). Unlike Levi-Strauss's structuralist thought, Turner was interested in discovering how rituals work, what rituals do, and how people handle symbols during ritual performance. For Turner, Peirano (2002: 23) said symbols have the quality of efficacy, in other words, 'symbols are good to manipulate and the symbols work, as they are not just reflections of cognitive classifications'<sup>16</sup> (as Levi-Strauss believed).

While Levi-Strauss's structural theory turned away from rituals to focus more particularly on myths, according to Couldry (2003:25) two scholars greatly influenced by Levi-Strauss's work, Douglas (1966) and Leach (1976), were very concerned with ritual. According to Segalen (1999) and Bell (1992), Douglas (1966), in her classic book 'Purity and danger', reassigned rituals' importance and created an analytical model to analyse the different levels of rituals in different types of society. This model was based on the idea of the 'grid' and the 'group'. Douglas (1966) understood that a society with a strong 'grid' (order, classification, symbolic system) and strong 'group' (strength of people's associations as a tightly knit community) would be marked by a reasonable amount of ritual activities, while societies with a weak 'grid' or weak 'group' would have fewer rituals and allow for more individualism. Leach (1976) was another scholar who discussed rituals (Peirano, 2002). He argued that 'we engage in rituals in order to transmit collective messages to ourselves' (Leach, 1976, in Bell, 1997:64). Thus, for this author, the structuralism method would not reach universal structures, but simply the cultural ideals of a particular society.

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<sup>16</sup> Translated by the current author into English

Moreover, Leach in his paper '*Ritualization in man*' (1966) explained his approach to rituals by distinguishing three types of behaviours that influenced his thinking: 1) the rational-technical: behaviour which is directed to specific ends and produces results in a mechanical way (e.g. the cutting of a tree); 2) the communicative: behaviour which is part of a system that serves to convey information through a cultural code (e.g. an Englishman shaking hands), and 3) the magical: behaviour which is potent in itself in terms of the cultural conventions of the actors, but not effective in a rational-technical sense (e.g. an Englishman swearing an oath). Leach (1966) emphasized that ritual had been up to that time largely conceptualized in the third class of behaviours. However, he considered ritual as applicable to the second and third types of behaviours (having proximity to Goffman's idea of interaction ritual). The author did not distinguish between verbal and non-verbal behaviours; greeting with a handshake and taking an oath through words, to him, could both be rituals. Therefore, rituals could be a combination of words and actions, and keep a system of cultural categories responsive to human needs.

Another theorist identified with the cultural/semiotic approach, according to Baxter and Braithwaite (2006:261), who contributed to the study of rituals, was Geertz (1973). A ritual, for Geertz (1973), is a way of acting out symbols, which could be pictures, objects, actions, events, relationships, or anything else that conveys some meaning to someone. Thus, a ritual is a way of behaving that is supposed to reflect the 'world as lived' (ethos) and the 'world as imagined', showing how the two worlds fit perfectly together and that the community can experience this 'ultimately true' reality in its group behaviour. Bell (1997) states that for Geertz (1973), the most important function of a ritual is to send us back into everyday life, and convince us that our worldview and way of life is true, good, and fulfilling and we can continue in it. Thus, rituals can reinforce our commitment to the groups we are associated with, and are the ways that our society teaches us to live and to experience life, not only teaching us how life is but how it ought to be. Bell (1997) affirms that Geertz sees rituals as language-like codes (texts), and he rejects functionalist arguments that rituals describe social order. He argues that, in fact, rituals shape the social order and impose meaning on disordered experience. While Geertz and other cultural/semiotic scholars on rituals give special attention to the meaning of rituals rather than ritual actions, Bell, (1997) and Grimes (2014) state that scholars such as Bloch (1989) and Staal (1989) argue that meaning is communicated not only in the content of a ritual's symbols, but through its form, and its performance, in its stylization.

According to Baxter and Braithwaite (2006), the cultural/semiotic theoretical approach to ritual focuses on the meanings of rituals and on rituals' content (symbols), and what they

reveal about cultural values and beliefs, rather than rituals' function in individual psychic coherence or consistency of a social group. Another approach to rituals, however, focuses on notions of rituals as performance and practice. As Rappaport (1999) says, 'ritual is always fundamentally action, not ideas' (Couldry, 2003:24). While the functionalist approach is concerned with the social or individual functions of rituals and the cultural/semiotic with their meanings, the key question of the performance and practice approach is: 'How is social reality constituted and re-constituted in the enactment of rituals?' (Baxter and Braithwaite, 2006:264). The performance metaphor allowed scholars such as Bell (1997:72) to later develop an approach to ritual that focuses on the idea of practice. Bell aimed to focus on 'what ritual actually does, rather than on what it is supposed to mean' (Bell, 1997: 72).

Historically, according to Schechner (2002:38) theories about ritual 'as performance' arose in the mid-1970s and a number of theorists endorsed the performance approach to the study of ritual. For example, Turner's (1982) ritual as 'social drama' and performance, Goffman's (1959, 1967) study on performance of everyday life and ritual as performance of social interactions, Bloch's (1974) analysis of the effects of speech and song, Tambiah's (1985) concept of performative action and Schechner's (2002) work on performance and theatre are among the most-cited theorists of the performance approach to ritual.

Turner (1974, 1982), for example, shifts his emphasis from the social drama of traditional societies to performance theory, focusing on 'modern' societies and comparing symbolic systems of culture that developed before and after the industrial revolution. Goffman's (1959) study of the social reality and interpretation of individual behaviours in everyday life was constructed using the theatre and dramaturgy as the reference. The representation of the self is oriented according to social roles and performance is according to the expectations of the audience. Thus, the social importance of ritualized behaviour is its potential to stabilize social actions and to prevent disruption in relationships. Individuals want to offer and maintain a positive self-image (the face) of themselves to others, and people remain guarded to ensure that they do not show themselves to others in an unfavourable light. The notion of performance, therefore, is present in Goffman's studies with reference to role-playing, as a kind of ritual behaviour of social actors in everyday life. In this light, the performance theorists expand the notion of ritual to the ordinary lives of ordinary people.

These theorists allow a variety of social activities to be identified as having a ritual quality. In fact, they have argued 'that artificial conceptual boundaries have been made between

rituals and such genres as plays, festivals, drama, rock concerts, and other forms of celebrations and interactions of people's lives' (Baxter and Braithwaite, 2006:266). In addition to seeing that ritual qualities can be found in a range of diverse events, performance theorists have also been concerned with the efficacy of those ritual activities. The efficacy of ritual is a major goal for performance theorists, to show that 'ritual does what it does by virtue of its dynamic, diachronic, and physical characteristics', rather than considering ritual performance as 'the secondary realization or acting out of synchronic structures, tradition, or cognitive maps' (Bell, 1997: 75). According to Bell (1997:75), performance theory is useful for the analysis of rituals as 'it stresses the dramatic process that a ritual involves'. By seeing ritual as a performance 'the significance of the physical and bodily expressiveness found in ritual, and its evocative attention to secular and new forms of ritual or "ritual-like" activity' (a term used by Bell, 1992: 138 in reference to Turner's idea of 'liminal-like') is highlighted. Moore and Myerhoff's (1977) work on secular rituals also expresses the diversity of secular rituals in contemporary societies, listing examples from life-cycle rites of passage to political rituals, games, athletic contexts, football matches, carnivals, birthday celebrations, marriages, funerals, graduations, and formal greetings.

Bell (1992) argues that in modern Western societies, rituals are usually only thought of as a set of activities inherently different from daily routines, or close to the sacralities of tradition or organized religion. She stresses, however, that this view is blind to a variety of activities that are ritualized to greater or lesser degrees. She terms them 'ritual-like' (echoing Turner's notion of 'liminal-like'). Based on the notion of performance and the diversity of secular rituals, Bell (1997) proposes a way to look at rituals as practices. She states that rituals are a set of activities which could be conceptualized in terms of practice theories (see Bourdieu, 1977; Foucault, 1980). She approaches ritual activities by stressing their primacy as a social act itself, and how human activities can be ritualized to different degree. The process of ritualizing of some activities she names ritualization. It is a way of acting in specific social situations. Thus, rituals are situational, strategic, embedded in some degree of 'misrecognition' of what it is in fact doing (a notion based on Bourdieu's idea of habitus and symbolic power), but it also comprises 'the will to act, which is able to reproduce or reconfigure the set of ritual activities' (Bell, 1992:81). Bell, then, proposes that by looking at rituals as practices, the focus turns to the ritualization process. It comprises a set of activities which are historically, socially and culturally constructed and reconstructed as rituals.

This notion has helped to overcome the static view of structuralism, which considers human activity, like rituals, as a matter of enacting cultural rules. For her, performance and practice theorists' claims reveal that human activities, as 'formal as religious practices or as casual as a midday stroll are creative strategies by which human beings continually reproduce and reshape their social and cultural environment' (Bell, 1997: 80). Thus, Bell (1992:36) argues that scholars on ritual who lean more to practice theory tend to focus particular attention on the social agency, historical process, and political dimension of human activities, and 'how ritual enactments, as affirmed by Bourdieu, are a variety of socially informed body senses'. But they are also able to construct, reconstruct, manipulate and even resist relations of domination and subordination.

In this sense, Bell (1997:71) argues that studying rituals as practices is important, as it does not set up a tight and narrow definition of rituals which tends to 'override and undermine the significance of indigenous distinction among ways of acting'. She advocates that it is more useful to pose questions such as: 'under what circumstances are such activities distinguished from other forms of activity? How and why are they distinguished? What do these activities do that other activities cannot or will not do?' (Bell, 1997:70) Thus, the ritualization process of ways of acting is constituted by situational features, meaning that people participate in ritualization as 'a practical way of dealing with some specific circumstances' (Bell, 1997:110). It is also 'strategies for differentiating' one way of acting – to various degrees and in various ways – from other ways of acting, which will vary between particular cultures and/or groups. A ritualized practice is the production of differentiation, and a way of acting that specifically establishes a contrast to that practice, and differentiates itself as 'special'. Such distinctions may be drawn in a variety of culturally and historically specific ways. Bell (1992:91) gives an example:

[...] ritualization of the meal could employ a different set of strategies to differentiate it from conventional eating, such as holding the meal only once in a person's lifetime or with too much food for normal nourishment. The choice of strategies would depend in part on which ones could most effectively render the meal symbolically dominant to its conventional counterparts. The choice would also depend on the particular 'work' the ritualized acts aimed to accomplish in a situation.

Bell (1992) suggests that rather than imposing or departing from rigid categories of what is or not a ritual, it may be more useful to look at 'how human activities establish and manipulate their own differentiation and purpose, in the very doing of the act within the context

of other ways of acting' (Bell, 1992:74). Thus, the term ritualization sheds light on certain social actions which are strategically distinguished by the social actors in relation to other actions. The 'ritualization could involve the exact repetition of a centuries-old tradition or deliberately radical innovation and improvisation' (Bell, 1992: 91). This notion is important to this thesis as I show below.

Moreover, according to Bell (1997), while it is inadequate to frame ritualization as a process of reproduction of traditions (as a tradition is also a constructed social category as argued by Hosbawn and Terence, 1983), it is also inappropriate to frame it as social control (in Foucault's sense). Ritualization of a set of activities is not a matter of just transmitting shared beliefs and introducing a dominant ideology as an internal subjectivity. In fact, the ritualization of practices requires some agency of the participants in producing them, as 'ritual symbols and meanings are too indeterminate and their schemes too flexible to lend themselves to any simple process of instilling fixed ideas' (Bell, 1997:221). Indeed, she argues ritual activities as a ritualization process is grounding and can display a sense of community, without superseding the autonomy of individuals or groups.

The theories of ritual discussed above cannot be read as a simple evolutionary sequence, in which the earlier theories were successfully surpassed by the more recent ones. In fact, all of them are still found in studies of ritual today to some degree, particularly in the study of family rituals. The order described above was more an attempt to systematically cover the large field of ritual, and logically there is no strict line in the theorists' works. In fact, many theorists and theories incorporate elements of all the perspectives described above, leaning the argument more one way than another at a certain time or for particular analysis. In summary, ritual can be seen as a mechanism for bringing the individual into the community and establishing a social entity; or ritual could be approached as a 'process for social transformation, for catharsis, for embodying symbolic values, for defining the nature of the real, or for struggling over control of a sign' (Bell, 1997:89), or as practice historically, socially and culturally constructed and reconstructed in a process of ritualization. My study dialogues closest with the last perspective. However, these are all strong reflections which have differently influenced and been used in the narrower focus on family rituals. Some scholars have focused close attention on the ritualization connected to family life (Gillis, 1996; Cheal, 1988, 2002, 2008) and these studies seek to answer questions such as: when do family rituals become important to family life? What is the importance of them to the constitution of family life? How do families ritualize? It is to these debates on family rituals that this thesis now turns.

### *Ritualization of family and family rituals*

Historically, as described by Cheal (2002, 2008), up to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries family relationships were not considered as being composed of separate times and distinct practices. In fact, families were the units of labour activities, learning and health care. Families were made up of all the members of the household economy, and economic relations were family relations. In addition, the working role of women was not yet linked with motherhood, and the father's business did not remove him from daily contact with his children. In this context, as the household remained the unit of production and consumption, work time and family time were quite undifferentiated. According to Cheal, up to the 1840s

[...] family time was the same as any other time, family space the same as any other space, without any special meaning or symbolization. Communities and religious groups had their special days and sacred places, but not families. Birthdays, for example, were private moments for the individual to review his or her spiritual accounts, not the family occasions they were later to become (Cheal, 2008:21).

According to Gillis (1996) and Cheal (2002, 2008) it was only around the middle of the nineteenth century, with the transformation introduced by industrialization, urbanization and the division of labour that family relationships became differentiated and the need arose to 'make time for family' (Gillis, 1996: 56). Indeed, it was around this time that the notion of the house became separated from the outside world, both symbolically and physically, creating the distinction between house and home. Home meant a space for the family, clearly separate from work and its meanings. Gillis (1996:88) argues that 'western societies have been living with not one but two kinds of time, one quantifiable and linear, the other qualitative and cyclical'. Linear time is divided into standard units of distinct beginning and end, it is the product of the imperatives of the modern economy and the nation-state; nothing is beyond its reach, including families. But, cyclical time represents distinct moments and they have become the realm of the family. This author, then, affirms that families have learned to live with linear time by creating their own kinds of cyclical time. The need to 'make time for family', different from linear time (but interrelated with it), and distinguished from other activities (as Bell points out) led to the ritualization of family life and the creation of various activities which become known as 'family rituals' (Cheal, 2002; Gillis, 1996; Morgan, 2011b).

A number of scholars interested in family studies, from a variety of academic backgrounds, have tried to conceptualize, systematize and classify family rituals (see Bossard



and Boll, 1950; Wolin and Bennett, 1984; Imber-Black and Roberts, 1998; Fiese et al., 2002; Baxter and Braithwaite, 2006; Costa, 2011). These studies represent an important effort to identify family rituals.

As argued by Baxter and Braithwaite (2006), Bossard and Boll's (1950) seminal work on family rituals are credited as a pioneering study in family studies to identify what a family ritual was and what counted as a family ritual. The authors identified certain forms of family relationships which were repeated with frequency as family rituals. For Bossard and Boll (1950) family rituals had some rigidity, normalcy and inevitability. They therefore defined family rituals as: '[...] prescribed procedures which emerge from family interactions and involve a set of defined pattern behaviours, with the aim of acquiring a purpose' (Bossard and Boll, 1950, in Costa, 2011:3817). According to Bossard and Boll, family rituals operate with three essential aspects: prescription, rigidity and rightness. For them, if a family member does not practise a family ritual, a sense of wrongness could be created. This approach echoes the functional-structuralist view and understands family rituals as fixed elements capable of establishing some family cohesion. They grouped family rituals into two types – traditional and spontaneous. The first ones are those passed from generation to generation, sporadic and symbolic and are common to the community as well, for example: go to Church on Sunday, or decorating the Christmas tree. The second type, spontaneous family rituals emerge in situations of inner family interactions, for example: eating meals together, playing during weekends or spending summer holidays together.

Wolin and Bennett (1984) extended Bossard and Boll's (1950) view of family rituals and elaborated a theory which combined different elements of the ritual studies described above. They identified family rituals as a symbolic form of communication, which is enacted systematically and repeatedly over time and holds special meaning for family members. According to them, it is through their special meaning and their repetition that family rituals contribute significantly to the establishment and maintenance of a family's collective sense of itself and the creation of a family identity, that would give to family members a mutual sense of togetherness. Thus, ritualizing in the family is important for establishing its identity, but the boundary separating family rituals from non-rituals is not clear-cut. The distinction should be observed in the family dynamic, taking into account what the members of the same family report as symbolic behaviour, being repeated, that carries meaning for the family identity.

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<sup>17</sup> Translated by the current author into English

Wolin and Bennett (1984) identify three types of family rituals – family celebrations, traditions and patterned family interactions – which differ in terms of the degree to which they are connected to cultural practices, and their intensity of organization and repetition. By family celebrations, they mean public holiday practices, which vary among countries and cultures, and are the most stylized, organized and less frequent family rituals, usually belonging to the annual calendar, including Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, national holidays, etc. In this category they also include rites of passage such as births, weddings, graduation parties and funerals. The second type of family rituals defined by Wolin and Bennett (1984) are family traditions, which are family activities that are stylized but have more flexibility in their organization and are more frequent than the celebration ones. These include, for example, birthdays, family holidays, special anniversaries, family visits and Sunday dinner. Finally, some family rituals happen in day-to-day interactions. Wolin and Bennett (1984) identify these as ‘patterned family interactions’, which are the most frequently enacted family rituals, but least consciously planned by the participants. Specifically, this category includes family rituals such as home childcare, household chores, leisure activities during the week or at the weekend, family meals and sleeping time. Their typology of family rituals influenced other scholars on family rituals such as Imber-Black and Roberts (1998) and Costa (2011).

Imber-Black and Roberts (1998) consider four types of family rituals: holiday celebrations, family traditions, day-to-day essentials and life-cycle. The celebration rituals are rituals that families practise to respond to an outside calendar, which is demarcated by each society differently, such as Thanksgiving Day, Ramadan, the Chinese New Year, Easter, and Christmas. Costa (2011), who divided family rituals between ‘small, in media res and big days’<sup>18</sup>, framed celebration rituals as constituting the family’s ‘big days’, and included life-cycle rituals, such as weddings, births and funerals. While the celebration rituals define important occasions from a cultural point of view, these scholars argue that family ‘tradition’ rituals belong to the ‘inside’ calendar of the family. Each family defines their special moments to celebrate. In this context, ‘traditional’ family rituals can be practised with more spontaneity than celebration ones. For example, the birthday of a family member can be celebrated on a different date in order to accommodate family members’ attendance, or the party’s organization. Like celebration rituals, traditional ones come with certain common symbols and practices. For example, a birthday celebration usually includes a birthday cake, the giving of

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<sup>18</sup> Costa (2011)’s terms translated by the current author in English.

gifts and offering of food and drink to guests. The third category of family rituals identified by Imber-Black and Roberts (1993) concerns essential day-to-day needs or, as Costa (2011:95) calls them, the family rituals constituting the 'small days'. Unlike the other family rituals – celebration and traditional – these occur more frequently, and are less planned and less recognized as such by the participants. They offer more possibilities for spontaneity, and also can be adapted to the family's own development, structure and life stages, but still have a high symbolic and affective significance for family members.

Besides these typologies, family scholars Wolin and Bennett (1984) drew on Turner's (1969, 1982) work to explain and distinguish family rituals, which they argued as having three relevant features: transformation, communication and stabilization. The first corresponds to the 'liminal-like' sense, which begins when another activity is suspended and time is dedicated to creating family time. The family time is a period of 'liminality', which can produce the experience of a sense of familyhood for the family participants (an important notion I will develop further in the empirical chapters). According to Wolin and Bennett, the 'liminal-like' moment in family life can be observed in family events, such as 'the moment when the lights are turned out and the family awaits the arrival of the birthday cake' or an ordinary evening at home where a dinner is prepared and shared to leave the daily work problems outside the home (1984:05). These moments are part of the transitional phase, and lead to a strong feeling of 'we are not what we were before' (1984:406). They allow the participants in the family ritual to experience what Turner (1982) calls the 'liminal-like' moment, even if very short, which is a feature of liminal moments. Such experiences can engender a sense of connectedness to each other, and as the family ritual comes to the end the family members 'step-out' of it and depart, but the sense of togetherness stays. However, to continue the family feeling of connection there is a need for the family ritual to be repeated. It is important for the family ritual to be cyclical.

The second feature that distinguishes a family ritual, for Wolin and Bennett (1984), is communication, which takes two interactive forms: affective and symbolic. They noticed that as a dramatic performance, the family rituals carried a strong sense of affection, which could be observed in daily family rituals, such as dinnertime, as well as in celebratory events such as marriages or funerals. They argue that, regarding a dinnertime, the mere fact of coming together at the same time of day for a common purpose leads to strong affective connotations. Besides the affective communication, family rituals are also able to provide meaning for the family members via the symbols used in the family ritual performance. The symbols can be concrete, such as those that attach the family with its past, for example the repetition of having the same foods, decoration, and so on; or symbolic communication can take place through behavioural

patterns such as ‘which family member comes to whose house and seating arrangements at the table, which can symbolize power relationships, generational ties, responsibilities and unsettled conflicts’ (Wolin and Bennett, 1984: 410). In addition, Wolin and Bennett affirm that family rituals lead to stabilization – the last feature of family rituals identified by these authors. Wolin and Bennett (1984) argue that family rituals stabilize the family in two aspects of time: ‘the here and now’, which brings the family together in the ‘liminal-like’ moments; and also the linking of the family with the past and future. They note that a family ritual can create a link with the past when a previous generation’s family ritual practices are adopted and adapted by the present generation; and the bond with the future is made in the expectation that the next generation will continue the family ritual.

Like Wolin and Bennett, Fiese et al. (2002), in a review of the last 50 years of research on family rituals, elaborated a distinction for what could be counted as family rituals. They considered three features that differentiated family rituals from other family activities, which they called family routines: communication, commitment and continuity. In the case of family routines, communication is identified as typically instrumental for conveying information that ‘this is what needs to be done’, while family rituals involve symbolic communication that conveys ‘this is who we are’ as a group. In the case of commitment, family routines involve just momentary time, with ‘little conscious thought given after the act’ and not much is left to remember, whereas family rituals carry an affective dimension that leaves the ‘individual feeling that the activity provides some sense of belonging’ (Fiese et al., 2002:382). Regarding continuity, family routines are defined as ‘directly observable and detectable by outsiders’, where ‘behavior is repeated over time’ (Fiese et al., 2002:383). These behaviours usually do not carry a substantial meaning for the family members, but family rituals, on the other hand, are usually reported as providing meaning which can be remembered and felt again through significant memories.

Fiese et al. (2002:382) argue that a family ritual has ‘an emotional residue where once the act is completed, the individual may replay it in memory to recapture some of the affective experience’, for example a photo album or meaningful objects. Thus, Fiese et al. (2002) and Fiese (2006) argue that family rituals have meanings that cross generations, and their repetition over time has the ability to create a family identity which can be expressed in phrases such as ‘this is how our family are and will continue to be’ (Fiese et al., 2002:382). In this vein, the authors affirm, ‘when family routines are disrupted, it is a hassle, [but] when family rituals are disrupted, there is a threat to group cohesion’ (2002:382).

Some other authors on family rituals such as Baxter and Braithwaite (2006) and Baxter and Clark (2009) approach family rituals more from a performance and practice angle. For them, family rituals can expose tensions within interpersonal relationships, while at the same time assuming a continual maintenance and repair of these tensions, in a dialectical process. These scholars consider that relationships in general, and family relationships in particular, are not linear and in fact can be characterized by contradictions. Family rituals are therefore key to organizing and negotiating the relational contradictions. This approach, then, identifies family rituals as aesthetic moments essential for stabilizing the families' social drama, even if only temporarily.

As shown above, scholars have studied family rituals influenced by a variety of academic approaches. Baxter and Braithwaite's (2006) work summarizes the most common features of family rituals. First, they say that family rituals are social action. Morgan (2011b) also affirms that family rituals are family practices. They are forms of 'doing family', which provide important occasions for the working and re-working of family relationships. Family rituals are then understood as performance among family members, which requires a minimum of two people to be enacted, guided by pre-existing conceptions (not intrinsic, but constructed) which are the enactment and the criteria for its evaluation and continuity. Family rituals are also voluntary actions with regard to whether to participate and how to participate. Although some family rituals might hold high expectations of family members' participation, the family members can choose not to take part, although usually this can lead to family instability, as Fiese et al. (2002) noted.

Thus, in some circumstances family rituals can, as argued by Bell (1992:92), carry a symbolic power or sense of obligation (in Bourdieu's term) to practise them. Nonetheless, family rituals are not rigid practices as they are subject to change over time, as the family faces transformations. Moreover, they are 'non-instrumental yet serious and meaningful' (Couldry, 2003:62) to differentiate family moments from others, and to the constitution of the family, and its notion of perceiving itself as a family, with a sense of familyhood. They are rarely organized by a rational means-ends logic, but are an important set of activities to establish and sustain family identities and bonds of affections (Finch, 2007; Morgan, 2011b; Baxter and Braithwaite, 2006). Morgan (2011b:120) affirms that family rituals can be distinguished between those family rituals which are associated with major life events (weddings, births, funerals), which frequently involve people from outside the immediate family circle and those other more informal recognitions of birthdays or regular family get-togethers.

Gardner and Grillo (2002) argue that transnational households and family rituals have been poorly documented, claiming that the transnational practices of migrant families, aside from sending home remittances and other economic activities, have been under-researched. As I have shown, the research on transnational families has expanded since their article, and has developed beyond the mapping of economic remittances, with, for example, the care approach. However, the call to focus on family rituals still has the potential to generate further studies. The research on family rituals practised transnationally has tended to focus on rituals closely linked to religious beliefs, mainly to do with Islam (Al-Ali, 2002; Gardner, 2002; Salih, 2002) and/or life-cycle rituals, such as marriages and funerals (Mand, 2002; Olwig, 2002; Charsley, 2006; Gardner, 2002). These authors tend to describe how families practise those rituals at a distance. However, less focus has been given to how the family not only practise certain family rituals, but, in fact, how they create and recreate them at a distance. Thus, there is room to look at family rituals from a more mundane and secular point of view. Falicov (2002:201), for example, notes:

Studies of immigrant families should include a close look at the persistence and the evolving new shapes of family rituals – from family interactions (dinners and prayers) to celebration of birthdays, holidays, and rites of passage or any gathering where a sense of family and national belonging is reaffirmed. Such study could help us understand not only the stable and shifting meanings of rituals but also their functions as metaphors for continuity and change.

Informed by the literature review on rituals, ritualization and family rituals, this thesis does not follow a rigid, close definition or typology of family rituals to apply to the transnational families studied here. It will instead be empirically constructed based on the narratives of the study participants. In the research process, the transnational families of this study revealed their ritualization of a set of family practices to create a family time across the distance. I therefore tried to identify the voluntary and recurring practices performed by these family members, those which were the result of family interactions and framed as distinguished and having a symbolic and affective meaning (not necessarily satisfactory or positive, but meaningful). They also usually left traces that constituted their family's memories and history. I therefore aim to show that, for the group in this study, practising family in a ritualized way was an important way of acting for their constitution of a sense of familyhood. Thus, looking at transnational family relationships with the family ritual lens, considering it, as Bell (1992) argues, as a ritualization process, historically, socially and culturally constructed, was a

powerful analytical approach to my study. It provided the conceptual resources to think about how Brazilian migrant women 'do family' transnationally.

Table 2.1: Summary some family rituals

Bossard and Boll (1950)		Wolin and Bennett (1984)			Imber-Black and Roberts (1998)				Costa (2011)		
Traditional	Spontaneous	Celebrations	Traditional	Patterned interactions	Life-cycle rituals: From birth to death	Holiday celebrations Outside calendar	Family traditions Inside calendar	Day to day essentials	Small days Inside family rituals	'Media res' Traditional annual Inside to outside family rituals	Big days Outside to inside family rituals
Going to Mass on Sunday; Decorating the Christmas tree; Sending Christmas cards; Painting Easter eggs; Fireworks on 4 <sup>th</sup> July; Turkey dinner at Thanksgiving	Making the bed; Eating meals together; Performing household chores; Relaxing during weekends; Summer holidays	<b>Public holidays:</b> Christmas, national holidays, Easter, Thanksgiving, Carnivals, Chinese New Year <b>Rites of passage:</b> Births, Marriages, Graduation, Funerals	Birthday; Family holiday; Special anniversaries; Family visits; Bedtime stories; Sunday dinner	Childcare; Household chores; Leisure activities in the week and at weekends; Family meals; Bedtime	<b>Birth:</b> Baby showers, Adoption days, Naming ceremonies <b>Marriage:</b> Engagement parties, confirmation; weddings <b>Death:</b> Funerals	Christmas; Thanksgiving day; Ramadan; Chinese New Year; St Patrick's day	Birthday; Family dinner; Summer holidays; Wedding anniversary	Eating; Sleeping; Greetings: Hello and Goodbye	<b>Daily:</b> waking-up and dressing children; Preparation of lunch; Going out of house; Dropping children at school; Preparation of dinner; Dinnertime Bedtime <b>Weekend:</b> Going to supermarket; Going shopping or to a park	Birthdays; Summer holidays; Family occasion: Christmas, Easter	Weddings; Births; Funerals
<b>The main features of these rituals (organization/stylization, flexibility and repetition)</b>											
Inherited, ostentatious, sporadic, symbolic	Spontaneous, simple, frequent, useful	Organized, predefined arrangements, sporadic, symbolic to outside world	Less organized, More flexibility on planning, More frequent (annually)	More spontaneous More frequent (daily or weekly),	Very organized and usually mark a life-course moment	Organized, predefined arrangement, annual frequency	Less organized, more flexibility, annual frequency	Less predefined arrangement, and daily or weekly frequency	Daily and weekend Divide the periods of the day Frequent, spontaneous, flexible	Organized, predefined arrangement, annual frequency	Very organized and usually happen only once in the life-course
Source: Self-elaboration											



## **Concluding remarks**

In this literature review chapter, I have demonstrated that transnational family studies have interfaces with some important areas of research, such as transnational, feminist and family studies. Studying transnational families has become, then, an important subject of inquiry and interdisciplinary field of research. The dialogue with transnational migration studies has helped in looking at family life at a distance beyond methodological nationalism and considering the diversity of people involved in transnational migration. In addition, it has helped to look at transnational practices as intertwining of everyday lives and a historical constructed process. It has also helped with looking at them as not happening in a 'space of flow' but being located in the 'real-world' of people's lives. Moreover, in this literature review, I noted that feminist scholarship on migration has also contributed to thinking about family life beyond the nuclear family model and has shed light on women's experiences as migrants and in the family relationships constituted at a distance. In this chapter, I have also shown that concepts of family studies such as the notions of 'doing family' and 'family practices' are important in thinking about transnational family life. Finally, in the last part of this chapter, informed by the biographical narratives of Brazilian migrant women in the UK, my thesis proposes an analytical framework focusing on the practice of family rituals created and recreated by this group at a distance.

In this thesis, my understanding of family rituals dialogues with Bell (1997) and Morgan's (2011b) ideas. As Bell (1997) noted about rituals in general, I also considered as important to family rituals, considering that family rituals have no intrinsic features, or are a set of activities predefined to provide social control, which exist somewhere 'out there' and that people repeat in an unrecognized way. Rather, in this thesis, I understand family rituals as a set of activities that family members distinguish as highly valued by them that can be constructed and reconstructed by them, to mark their sense of familyhood. It is on this point that I considered Morgan's (2011b) notion of the 'sense of everyday' with family practices as relevant to my analysis of 'doing family' at a distance. In order to know what is highly valued by family members, I took Morgan's point that to understand family life a researcher needs to interact with the family members, asking what is important to them in their

‘doing’ family relationships at a distance. Only the family members themselves can know what is highly valued for them in the constitution of their family.

Moreover, in line with Bell’s (1997) idea of ritualization, I understood that family rituals can be a set of activities constructed historically, culturally, socially long ago or could be only recently and biographically constructed as family rituals. I built on the idea that family rituals can be created and recreated in the family’s life-course. Thus, they should not be seen as fixed constructions. Looking at family rituals informed by Morgan’s (2011b) notion of family practices allowed a better perception that they could have a ‘sense of fluidity’ regarding their capacity to adapt to being practised in different ways, even at a distance. Moreover, family rituals comprise a ‘sense of the regular’ with repetition which can be daily, weekly, monthly, annually or as a life-course event. The importance of the repetition of family rituals is in providing a sense of continuity of the family relationships. I argue that it is also important to mark and distinguish a particular moment as a family time. In addition, the repetition of certain practices can lead to the construction of the family memories and history.

Family rituals, then, are understood as a set of activities which are not rigid or predefined, existing somewhere in family life, but are historically, culturally, socially and biographically constructed and reconstructed. The ritualist features, I identified, are distinguished by family members and usually include: recurring performance by and towards family members, resulting from interactions which usually involve some preparation, have symbolic and affective meaning for the family, and usually leave traces that constitute family memories and history. I recognised these as important for the construction and reconstruction of a sense of familyhood, even living at a distance.

This literature review chapter helped to set the basis for the analysis of the transnational family relationships of the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil. In the next chapter I show the methodological pathway for the research.

## Chapter 3

### **Researching the transnational family: a methodological framework**

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The overall aim of this research was to explore how Brazilian migrant women ‘do family’ with their family members in Brazil and how and to what extent these transnational families constitute their sense of familyhood although living in geographically distant countries for extended periods of time. This chapter, then, discusses the methodological framework adopted to address these objectives. I have adopted a qualitative framework based on the methods of multi-sited ethnography located at the participants’ houses in London and Brazil, biographical interviews and diaries.

I have divided this chapter into three parts. In the first part I outline the debates on the methods when researching transnational families, and describe the methodological framework and methods I used in this research. In the second part I describe the research pathway: 1) the research pilot study, 2) fieldwork carried out in London, 3) fieldwork carried out in Brazil, and finally, 4) I outline the data analysis process. I end this chapter with a reflection on the challenges I encountered during my fieldwork, a discussion of the ethical considerations and the co-production process of this research.

#### **1. Researching transnational families**

As shown in the previous chapter, transnational studies emerged in the 1990s and since then the transnational notion has been subject to wide discussion. Although various debates have emerged regarding the form to approach transnational phenomena, there has been less doubt about the need for a methodological shift in studies concerning migrant lives. According to Levitt and Glick-Schiller (2004) the nation-state as a ‘bounded container’ of social relations has been challenged, and debates about the structure and agency have emerged too. Scholars such as Smith (2005), Ley (2004), Conradson and Latham (2005), Knowles (2003) and Knowles and

Harper (2009) have criticized studies about migration based on a macro-structural analysis. Conradson and Latham (2005:228), for example, make a call for greater attention to be paid to the ‘everyday dimensions of transnational mobility’. For them, it would ‘provide[s] a useful counterpoint to the inflationary [and even celebratory] tendencies of some writings on globalisation’ (2005:229). These scholars, then, criticize transnational approaches that regard migrants as victims of a wider global context (e.g. the global care chain perspective) and the idea that migrants ‘flow’ from one socially bounded entity to another. They argue that these perspectives are no longer adequate to analyse the complex and multidirectional processes and diversity of migrants and their experiences.

Levitt and Jaworsky (2007:142) advocate that transnational migration studies should consider the multiple actors who participate in, and are affected by, transnational migration processes. Conradson and Latham (2005:229) call for a ‘middling’ forms of transnationalism and suggest that transnational perspectives should encompass ‘many more people than just the transnational elites and the developing-world migrants who have been the focus of so much transnational research’. Middling transnationalism focuses on the transnational practices of social actors who occupy a more or less middle-class position in the national status of the countries of origin. As previously mentioned, the Brazilian migrant women of this research could be classed as such ‘middling’ transnational migrants. Such perspectives call for greater attention to the everyday lives of migrants to look at how transnational practices are lived and experienced by diverse groups, not in an ‘abstract space’, but are negotiated in the localities (Brickell and Datta, 2011).

According to Levitt and Jaworsky (2007), any study which takes transnational migration as the subject of analysis should not just be asking a different set of questions about different social spaces, but should also engage with new methods. In this same vein, Faist (2012:52) argues that a transnational lens should bring about a methodological shift and that the studies should include: 1) migrants as well as non-migrants in the research; 2) a challenge to the exclusive focus on the host societies to consider the multiple sites of transnational social fields; 3) the incorporation of a longitudinal (historical) perspective on the transnational dynamics. As has been highlighted by Levitt and Khagram (2007:12)

[...] because transnational migrants’ practices ebb over long periods, a one-time snap shot misses how people periodically engage with their home countries

during election cycles, family or ritual events, or climatic catastrophes. The study of migrant practices longitudinally reveals that in moments of crisis or opportunity, even those who have never identified or participated transnationally, but who are embedded in transnational social fields, may be mobilized into action.

As mentioned in the literature review chapter, up until the transnational turn in the 1990s, family studies were locally oriented, and consequently family migrant experiences were rather neglected or the studies were based on the host societies, usually on the assimilation and adaptation of gender roles. In the late 1990s, the first transnational family studies emerged. Their main focus of analysis was on the dyadic relationships of mothers and the children ‘left-behind’, under the perspective of the global care chain. Those studies usually focused on migrant mothers’ narratives in the host societies (mostly US based) and portrayed them as ‘helpless victims of global systems’ (see Hochschild, 2000; Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002; Parreñas, 2001b). Other studies on transnational families started to include the narratives of the ‘left-behind children’ and even other relatives in the home country (see Olwig, 1999).

More recently, transnational family studies have started to look at the diversity of family relationships constructed at a distance, beyond the mother-child relationships and the ‘care drain’ notion from the south to the north (see Olwig, 2014; Fresnoza-Flot, 2014; Kilkey, 2014; Baldassar et al., 2007; Baldassar and Wilding, 2014; Bonizzoni and Boccagni, 2014; Boccagni, 2012; Izuhara, 2010a, 2010b; Kilkey and Merla, 2013). These authors suggested including both migrants and ‘non-migrant’ family members in the research. According to Baldassar and Merla (2014:14), ‘non-migrant’ relatives are ‘another set of transnationals who are easily, but mistakenly, ignored’. Therefore, these more recent transnational family studies take into account the complex family relations which involve different family members and mediated processes, which can alter continuously over time, for example, during the life course due to technological developments and/or migration history.

In this context, scholars such as Kilkey and Möllenbeck (2016), Schier (2016), Baldassar (2016), and Baldassar and Merla (2014) point out that the lived experiences of transnational families are often complicated and messy. In addition, transnational family lives continuously alter, sometimes remarkably fast, but at other times more slowly, across long periods of time. They also involve and are affected by social constraints which can influence how the transnational families develop. The authors

consider that the ideal methodological approach to capture the dynamic and diverse nature of transnational families is ethnography. I therefore also adopted ethnography as the method to analyse how the Brazilian migrant women in the UK ‘do family’ with their family members in Brazil. In the next section, I describe in more detail how I used this method in my study.

### *‘Multi-sited’ ethnography at participants’ houses*

Conventionally, ethnography has involved a relatively long-term (typically several months, ideally a year or more) trip away, staying in a single site of choice, where the ethnographer will immerse him or herself in personal face-to-face relationships with the ‘natives’. A key component of ethnography, then, is participant observation which involves the ethnographer spending a significant period of time engaging with the social group that is the focus of study in a specific place away from ‘home’ (Herbert, 2000; Amit, 2000). However, this classical view of ethnography has been challenged by social sciences studies, suggesting that ethnography no longer needs to be sited away in exotic faraway places but, in fact, could be situated ‘at home’, for example in a nearby neighbourhood (Caputo, 2000). As Geertz (1983:151) noted ‘we are all native now’. Thus, as the world has become more connected, the differences (classical object of anthropological studies) have also become closer to the observer, and even the perspective of difference has been challenged and become relational (Da Matta, 2010; Peirano, 1995). According to Amit (2000: 2) the classical ethnography ‘no longer suffices even as a serviceable fiction for many contemporary ethnographers’. In this scenario different suggestions have emerged to approach and adapt ethnography to the contemporary world.

Marcus’s (1995) multi-sited idea of ethnography is one of the most cited suggestions of how to examine global processes and the increasing interconnectedness of people. He argues that studies concerned with transnational relationships should overcome the classical meaning of ethnography and break with the single-site convention of methodology. He affirms that studies with a transnational lens need to overcome the ‘Mallinowskian complex’ – meaning the siting of ethnography within a supposedly isolated, natural and fundamentally ‘other’ cultural system. Multi-sited ethnography differs from traditional ethnography in advocating that the researcher should follow a research topic across numerous spaces for shorter periods of time.

Multi-sited research would involve research in multiple locations and also the connections between these locations, for example, ‘virtual communication, or the actual journeys back and forth between the different research localities’ (Hannerz, 1998:24).

Although a multi-sited perspective on ethnography serves to go beyond the ‘one-site’ idea, it has been criticized as the number of potential site locations can be endless, if a study is to follow this method in the strict sense. Moreover, the abundant possibilities may overwhelm the researcher, limit the directional clarity of the study and make the data collection difficult. According to Falzon (2009), Boccagni (2010), Mazzucato (2009) and Glick (2010), a multi-sited perspective, in its strictest sense, implies an intensive everyday involvement and includes unspoken pretensions to holism.

Boccagni (2010:9) states that ‘[...] the expectation that multi-sited ethnographers should be able, by interlocking multiple ethnographic sites and concerns, to produce a unitary epistemological picture of a given phenomenon’ is a highly fascinating concept, nevertheless it lacks viability. Mazzucato (2009) argues that multi-sited ethnography, as conceptually proposed by Marcus (1995), can only be applied by a large research team, with generous funding. Thus, an individual researcher undertaking a PhD study, such as myself, would be unlikely to successfully complete such a task in the strict sense. Therefore, these authors suggest that to research transnational family relationships, a ‘bi-national’ ethnographical approach (Glick, 2010:506), ‘multi-sited’ in participants’ houses, is usually sufficient to capture the relevant parts of family interactions at a distance.

According to Glick (2010:507), in her recent review of research on transnational families ‘researchers have become increasingly aware of the bi-national realms in which many immigrant families operate and the strategies they employ’. In this vein, she argues that ‘bi-national’ or ‘bi-sited’ ethnography is a common solution to study transnational family lives. Boccagni (2010), for example, in his study of Ecuadorians in Italy reflects that a ‘multi-sited’ approach in reality would mean being physically present at ‘bi-national’ sites, such as Ecuador and Italy and, less obviously, but not less important, the research should get some involvement in a range of ‘distance-bridging practices’ such as phone calls, Internet communication, travelling back home, and the exchanging of gifts, which forms an element of transnational family relationships.

Several individual studies, and even team research studies, on transnational families have applied the ‘bi-national’ ethnography idea (see Madianou, 2012; Ariza, 2014; Fresnoza-Flot, 2014). They usually rely on conducting fieldwork in two sites (home and host countries) and engaging in visits to the transnational family members’ houses. For example, Madianou’s (2012) study on transnational family relationships took an empirical case of Filipino mothers in the UK and their children in the Philippines. She conducted ‘bi-national’ fieldwork with the Filipino women in the UK and conducted fieldwork in the Philippines with family members of their research participants.

By reading and reflecting on how transnational families have been studied and the viability of studying them, I decided to apply the ‘bi-national’ or ‘bi-sited’ fieldwork idea (Glick, 2010; Boccagni, 2010). Therefore, I decided to conduct fieldwork in the UK and in Brazil to include both the Brazilian migrant women and their family members’ narratives about their family relationships. Having decided on ‘bi-sited’ ethnography, I did not totally disregard the ‘multi-sited’ notion, as I conducted my fieldwork in the multi-localities of each of the participants’ houses.

Transnational family studies focus on family practices and interactions constructed at a distance, across national borders, and these practices are usually ‘bridged’ by technological tools, thus scholars have been inspired by some of the methods used in media studies, such as ethnography at participants’ houses (Silverstone et al., 1991; 1994). In participants’ houses, researchers in media studies have mapped family members’ practices and engagement with technologies (Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2006). Transnational family studies, such as Baldassar et al. (2007), Madianou and Miller (2011) and Boccagni (2010) made use of the method of ethnography at participants’ houses, combined with the technique of biographical interviews.

By conducting ethnographical observation at the participants’ houses, I could note how the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil organized their houses, where the technologies of communication (telephones, computers) were located – e.g. in the living room or in the kitchen. It was also possible to note whether the Brazilian migrant women and/or family members displayed photos, or if there were gifts or memorabilia of visits to their daughters or siblings in London, or objects that represented the ‘home’ country. At the participants’ houses, I could also observe their availability to receive visitors. In addition, conducting the fieldwork at the



participants' houses allowed me to be introduced to other family members, such as husbands and children in the UK and, in Brazil, local family members such as sisters-in-law, nieces and brothers. Besides, as they were at home the participants could spend a lot of time talking and showing letters, e-mails, photos, and could invite me to have a meal, a coffee, and another coffee with them. All this was part of the ethnographic approach adopted, as in some cases I went to the participants' houses more than once and could witness them receiving a text message, a telephone call or a Skype call from a family member in Brazil or from a migrant relative in the UK. This information was extensively recorded in my field diary.

Thus, as Falzon (2009:1) argues, 'ethnography is an eclectic methodological choice which privileges an engaged, contextually rich and nuanced type of qualitative social research'. But it is usually combined with other field techniques, such as 'note taking, audio/visual recording, interviews, an examination of the indigenous literature, observation, and such'. Therefore, besides the valuable information acquired during the ethnography at the participants' houses, I also conducted biographical qualitative interviews (Wengraf, 2001; Wengraf and Chamberlayne, 2006). According to Morgan (2011b), this is a useful technique for assessing family practices. In fact, according to Lawson (2000) and Apitzsch and Sioti (2007) it has been largely used to explore the lived experiences of transnational migrants. I considered the biographical narrative interview technique to be the most suitable for understanding the family stories and practices of the Brazilian migrant women in the UK and their family members in Brazil.

### ***The qualitative interview: biographical narrative interviews***

In order to understand and reconstruct transnational migration phenomena today, biographical narrative interviews can be considered as a main research component in researching (Apitzsch and Siouti, 2007:6).

The biographical method involves the collection of an account of a whole life or portion of a life, usually by an in-depth qualitative interview. In some cases, the account may be reinforced by a semi-structured interview or personal documents (Miller and Brewer, 2003). This method does not concentrate just on an individual's present situation. The biographical approach emphasizes the placement of the individual within a nexus of social connections, historical events and life experiences of past and present (their life history). In particular, according to Chamberlayne et al.

(2000) it allows participants to provide narrative accounts of their lived experiences, which can provide good evidence about their everyday lives and the meanings they attach to their experiences. Moreover, the biographical approach focuses on how individual accounts of life experiences can be understood within the contemporary cultural and structural settings (Svasek and Domecka, 2012). It is a method that helps to comprehend major societal changes that are underway, not merely at some broad social level, but at the individual level too (Roberts, 2002:5). Thus, it is a helpful method for understanding the constitution and reconstitution of a transnational family's linkages and sense of familyhood. In addition, this method is appropriate for capturing the family practices developed along with the migration history and life-course of participants – their creation, changes, and reconfigurations.

The use of this method of data collection in social research on migration studies stretches back to Thomas and Znaniecki's highly influential *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918-20), which devoted a whole volume to the life history of Polish migrants in the United States. This method was also used and developed by the Chicago School from the 1920s onwards. However, quantitative research replaced the biographical method in the social sciences in the US for a long time. The method went into a precipitate decline in the 1940s which was only reversed as part of the general blooming of qualitative methods of research in the 1970s mainly in Europe, and particularly in Germany (Chamberlayne et al., 2000). In Germany, migration studies at the beginning of the 1990s included the biographical approach as one of the main methods of data collection, and this is now being used in more recent approaches to migration such as the transnational perspective (Apitzsch and Siouti, 2007).

According to Apitzsch and Siouti (2007) the biographical method has become a central concept in interpretative social research. Moreover, they state that this approach is particularly suited to the data collection of social phenomena which are concerned with migration processes. In other words, this method is appropriate for studying a phenomenon which involves understanding past and present life experiences, including a longitudinal (historical) perspective. According to Chamberlain (2004) personal memories are involved in the social macro-structure in which the participants live, and can inform about the micro, meso and even macro social transformations. Thus, in order to recall memories and biographical life stories in a migration context, the biographical interview has been a widely used technique,

particularly in transnational family studies.

The biographical interview is a valuable technique to approach migrants and non-migrants' lived experiences, and according to Wengraf (2001) it can be designed in various ways. The German literature on biographical interviews has focused attention on a biographic-interpretive methodology (BIM), in which a narrative and unstructured interview model prevails. The BNIM (Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method) starts with a 'single question' (SQUIN – Single question aimed at inducing narrative) which asks for the life story, and then it should be followed by two sessions, in which the interviewer can frame questions (Rosenthal, 1993; Wengraf, 2001; Wengraf and Chamberlayne, 2006). This design allows participants a high degree of freedom to shape and order the reconstruction of their lives in their own way (Ritchie, 2003).

The approach I have used in this research is an adaptation of the BNIM. In the first session of the interview, BNIM suggests that the interviewer should offer 'only a carefully constructed single narrative question (SQUIN)' (Wengraf and Chamberlayne, 2006:8). In my study, the SQUIN was applied for the interviews of the Brazilian migrant women in London and their relatives in Brazil (see Appendices 1 and 2). The main purpose in using this technique (SQUIN) was to allow the interviewees to engage deeply with the interview by telling their migration story, leaving them free to tell me about their family relationships with family members in Brazil. As talking about one's own family relationships usually involves private, emotional and sensitive issues, by asking about events rather than questioning about opinions or generalizations, as suggested by the BNIM method, the interviewees tend to talk about what they do, think and feel. According to Gunaratnam (2013:1):

[...] talking about your views and emotions can be threatening for some people and can also be limited by what is seen as being socially acceptable or desirable. In other words, such questions [the why questions] may not get close to the *experience of events* in a life. And people's current opinions may get in the way of recalling the experience as they lived it then.

Thus, in the first part of the interview I followed the prescribed instructions of the BNIM technique. I started with an open narrative question and did not interrupt the participants. They talked freely about their stories until they stopped and asked for a question. A common statement after 20 or 30 minutes' talking was: *'I've talked a lot (laughs). What else would you like to know?'* (Helena, a 45-year-old living in the

UK since 1991, 08/05/2013). Once the interview reached this point, I would turn to the second and third sub-sessions of the interview.

After the first section, the BNIM method has prescriptions for the two subsequent sessions. But, unlike the first one, they were only partially followed in this research. For the second session, I asked further questions to follow up on topics raised in the first part. In this section I asked for more narrative, and also introduced some predefined topics, following a semi-structured guideline. Furthermore, the third session, which the BNIM technique suggests holding a month or more later, I carried out on the same day, usually after a short break (toilet or eating). In addition, as I encountered some participants more than once, some topics raised in this third session were continually returned to in our follow-up conversations. Hence, for the current study, the biographical interview narrative (BNIM design) was very helpful and I used some of its techniques, though not all, due to this method being extremely time-consuming, and because of the objectives of the research.

While the ethnography at the participants' houses and the biographical interviews provided substantial material and allowed information to be acquired about the past and present experiences of the Brazilian transnational families studied, in order to complement the data collected, I also used another method – the daily diary. This provided information on the events and lived experiences of the participants' family lives. Thus, the diary enabled me to get a better understanding of the practices of the Brazilian migrant women with their family members in Brazil.

### *The daily diary*

A diary, according to Alaszewski (2006:1), who studied the use of this technique in social research, can be defined as 'a document created by an individual who has maintained a regular, personal and contemporaneous record'. By *regularity* the author means that the diary is usually organized following a sequence of regular and dated entries over a period of time, for example each day or 'linked to specific events'. A diary is *personal* as 'the entries are made by an identifiable individual who controls access to the diary', and it is *contemporaneous* because 'the entries are made at the time or close enough to the time when events or activities occurred' (Alaszewski, 2006:1). Furthermore, the recorded entries usually include events, activities, interactions, impressions and feelings. Thus, by using a diary as a research technique,

the researcher can access the lives of the individuals they are studying, and its potential is in revealing patterns of behaviour, as well as providing insights into ‘how individuals interpret situations and ascribe meanings to actions and events’ (Alaszewski, 2006:37).

Moreover, using a diary is a good method for acquiring information about ‘facets of social life which members of social groups take for granted and are therefore not easily articulated or accessed through research methods such as interviews’ (Alaszewski, 2006: 37). This technique was used, among others, by Silverstone et al. (1994) in their seminal study of technologies at home. The ‘domestication’ process of technologies is usually taken for granted, and very little deep observation is given to the practices, behaviours and emotions that surround daily life around such technologies (Silverstone et al., 1994). The use of a diary was an important methodological tool for the ‘domestication’ of technology studies among families, as it provided data from daily, weekly and monthly activities. It was also helpful in making this activity visible to the participants. This was similarly noted in my study. In follow-up conversations with the participants they stressed how the diary had helped them realize the dynamics of their practices and interactions with their family members in Brazil. There were some cases where they were surprised to find that they interacted with some family members much more than with others. Thus, I used the diary as ‘tacit knowledge’, to access the ‘family practices’ which tend to be internalized and go unrecognized in the processes of socialization (Alaszewski, 2006:37).

Hence, while the biographical interviews relied on memories of past and present events, which was an indispensable method for understanding the Brazilian transnational family dynamics from a longitudinal perspective, the additional source of data from the daily diaries was important to acquire information on the actual recent forms of family interaction in more detail. The aim was to have more precise data about the transnational family interactions and the impact of new technologies on these interactions, and to acquire more information about who they talked to, when they talked, how and where they talked, and the feelings and emotions involved. The diary used the format of writing with a pen, and only minimal instruction was passed on to the participants (see Appendices 3 and 4). In fact, the participants were free to design their own diaries, so I ended up with various forms of diaries, from very long entries written every day during the pre-arranged period of a month, to short entries recorded

in the format of a big table. The diaries were only written by the Brazilian migrant women in London. As they were the main participants of this research I wanted to record their actual interactions with their families in Brazil, and I talked to them about issues in the diary in follow-up conversations.

## **2. The methodological pathway**

I conducted the main empirical research for this study over 21 months (May 2013 – January 2015), divided between the UK, particularly London, and Brazil (12 months in the UK and 9 months in Brazil). In this transnational fieldwork I was ‘at home’ and in the field simultaneously. Knowles (2000: 54) argues that ‘while researchers have been quick to document the transnationalism of others (Basch et al., 1994; Chamberlain, 1994; Garcia, 1994) they have been slow to reflect upon the impact of their own transnationalism on their research’. London was my ‘home’ of residence and my fieldwork place, which involved several incursions into the participants’ houses. The fieldwork also involved my own home country – Brazil. Thus, I had to travel to my own country (not an exotic place for me, but I still faced several challenges, which I describe in a section later in this chapter) and engage in many journeys inside the country to meet the family members of the Brazilian women participants of the research.

My fieldwork, then, went beyond being ‘out there’ in the field. It included my own personal biography, which shaped my research choices and ways I conducted the research. As Okely (1996) argues, ethnography fieldwork should take into account the importance of autobiographical reflexivity. The importance of this was in overcoming the long-standing exotic bias which artificially poses fieldwork versus home. Amit (2000:7) argues that the ‘melding of personal and professional roles in ethnographic fieldwork makes for a “messy, qualitative experience” (Marcus and Fischer, 1986:22), which cannot be compartmentalized from other experiences and periods of our lives’. My autobiography, then, deeply influenced the research choices I made during the entire research process and, clearly, this thesis is the result of the continuous interrelationship of my life and the research.

### *'Pre-fieldwork' and autobiography*

I am a white Brazilian woman with a middle-class background in Brazil and I migrated to London on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2007, after finishing my Master's degree in Social Science in Brazil. I came with a student visa to study English for 7 months. In the first week, I was working in a restaurant in central London, as a bartender, and the job demanded long shifts and carrying heavy loads. I worked in this place for two and half years. One day, looking in *Leros*, a Brazilian magazine, I found out about a Brazilian non-governmental organization in London called *Casa do Brasil em Londres*, a non-profit immigration advice centre which provides legal advice, psychological counselling, social assistance, and help with searching for jobs and accommodation. I talked to the director of the organization and started to work as a volunteer. The organization was very small with just one employee (the secretary), one volunteer and the director. After four months of working as a volunteer, the current secretary left the job and I was offered the position. Through working in this organization from Monday to Saturday, I encountered the Brazilian 'community' in London. During this work experience, I observed how numerous and diverse the Brazilians were. They (we) had come from different regions of Brazil (mostly from the southeast, south and mid-west) for various reasons (study, work, family reunion, adventure and so on) and worked in a number of areas, had different levels of education, but mostly higher level, lived in different areas in the UK (the majority in London) and faced different difficulties.

After 6 months working in this NGO, my sociological curiosity about Brazilians in the UK started to unfold. I began to investigate research about Brazilians in the UK and joined a Brazilian migration research group in the UK (GEB<sup>19</sup>). Therefore, prior to starting the PhD, I had participated in various activities and studies concerning Brazilian migrants in the UK, which strongly influenced the construction of the research enquiry, the method design and the fieldwork.

Since 2010, I have been on the executive committee of GEB and I participated in the editing of a dossier about Brazilians in London (Dias and Tonhati, 2010). In 2011,

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<sup>19</sup> Grupo de Estudos sobre Brasileiros no Reino Unido (Brazilian Migration to the UK Research Group)

I contributed to a survey project (Evans et al., 2011a), and two academic articles were published, reporting the results of this quantitative survey (Evans et al., 2011b, 2011c). In 2013, I participated in an exploratory study using an online survey, which aimed to draw up a profile of Brazilian migrant women, based on information from 365 questionnaires (Evans et al., 2013). More recently, in 2015, another report was launched with quantitative data from 700 Brazilian migrants in the UK. This last survey was carried out between 2013 and 2014 (Evans et al., 2015). Even though these two surveys could not be said to be wholly representative of the Brazilian population in the UK, they closely reflected the Brazilian migrant profile in this country and allowed me to gain important insights, which were extremely relevant to the first steps of this thesis, as I showed in the introduction chapter.

In addition, at the end of 2010, I joined a research project called THEMIS<sup>20</sup>, at Oxford University. This was a wider research project aimed at investigating how patterns of migration to Europe develop, focusing on the conditions that encourage initial moves by pioneer migrants to become established migration systems (or not). The project focused on researching Brazilian pioneer migrants, among other migrant groups (Moroccan and Ukrainian), in four destination countries (the UK, Norway, the Netherlands and Portugal). During my participation as a research assistant in the second and fourth phases of the project, I conducted 15 semi-structured qualitative interviews and also administered 63 questionnaires.

Besides my work on these research projects, from 2010 to 2011, I worked in *Casa do Brasil em Londres* (as mentioned above) and I also attended several AMBE<sup>21</sup> (Support for Brazilian Women Abroad) meetings, which were held monthly and whose purpose was to give Brazilian women support in learning more about the UK health service, immigration services and child support, as well as promoting dialogue in general.

These were valuable experiences which allowed me to establish close relationships with Brazilian migrant women and also provided resources for the design of my investigation. During these experiences several sociological questions arose and stirred my ‘sociological imagination’ (Mills, [1959] 2000). Although there were

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<sup>20</sup> THEMIS - Theorizing the Evolution of European Migration Systems, International Migration Institute (IMI).

<sup>21</sup> Apoio a Mulher Brasileira no Exterior - <http://www.ambe.org.uk/>



myriad opportunities and sociological issues that could be targeted, one that caught my attention was regarding family relationships constituted at a distance. I observed in these ‘pre-fieldwork’ experiences that the Brazilian migrant women, including myself, extremely valued their family relationships with relatives in Brazil. By this time, I was talking almost every day with my father and mother, and was constantly worrying about my grandparents, who were ill, and later passed away – my grandfather in 2011 and my grandmother in 2014. I believe my grandparents’ illness made me more sensitive to paying attention to family relationships and practices constructed at a distance. It therefore became a topic which caught my attention in the conversations of the Brazilians in *Casa do Brasil* and later in the interviews I did for the THEMIS research project and even during the AMBE meetings.

During the collection of data for the THEMIS project, for example, I interviewed both men and women. Although both demonstrated their desire to have relationships with their family members in Brazil, it struck me that in the women’s responses, their interactions with family members in Brazil were stressed as a significant commitment of their time. I noted that their commitments to their family members in Brazil was not only in recent times, due to the advances of technologies of communication or transport, but they emphasized their continuous commitment throughout their migration that for some started in the late 1980s. I did not identify in the men’s responses the same importance to construct family connections, at least not to the same degree.

Thus, this rich ‘real-life’ experience shaped my research, which developed around these initial thoughts. In order to develop this spark into sociological research, I engaged with the literature on transnational migration, feminist studies on migration, the family and transnational family studies. The actual study pathway can be divided into four phases: 1) the pilot study; 2) fieldwork in the UK; 3) fieldwork in Brazil; and 4) data analysis and writing-up.

### **Phase 1: The pilot study**

I conducted the pilot study in May 2013. It was when I established the first contact with my intended participant group, which was Brazilian migrant women who had lived in the UK for more than ten years, preferably having migrated in the 1980s and 1990s. I aimed to acquire longitudinal data about their family practices with their

family members in Brazil. In carrying out a pilot study, my intention was to perceive the challenges, limitations and potential to access this participant group. I was also concerned with their openness to talk about family issues, which usually orbit in the realm of the private and personal and, consequently, are less discussed with an 'outsider' to the family. Finally, the pilot study aimed to verify the possibilities and effectiveness of the methodological techniques of ethnography at participants' houses and the biographical interview.

I asked to interview two women I had previously interviewed for the Oxford University project (THEMIS). The decision to start my research with those Brazilian women was based on the stories they had told me about their long and continuous connections with their families in Brazil. They were pioneer Brazilian migrant women in moving to London. They had migrated in the late 1980s and 1990s and had gone through various life-course events, technological and migration changes that had probably transformed their practices, and the form and intensity of relations with their families in Brazil over the years. I contacted them by telephone and explained my research and the importance of their experiences to it. They readily responded and agreed to take part in my study. Thus, after the first conversation we exchanged some text messages and arranged a day and time. Regarding the place, I asked them if the interviews could be conducted at their houses, as it was important to the research.

Among the participants were Lucia, a 50-year-old living in the UK since 1986, who was divorced and living with a partner, whose mother and siblings lived in Brazil; and Helena, a 45-year-old living in the UK since 1991, who was married with three children, and whose mother and siblings lived in Brazil. When I arrived at their houses and they showed me round I was able to observe the rooms, the photos displayed of Brazilian family members, and other objects. Both invited me to eat with them while we talked freely and engaged in informal, but insightful, conversation. Later, I conducted the biographical interviews, which were audio-recorded.

Both their interviews and the participant observations at their houses were extremely enlightening, as they told me about their family dynamics, practices, relationships and transformations along their migration trajectory with their family members in Brazil. Afterwards, I took notes in my field diary, and then decided to use their networks and contact other participants through a snowball technique. But not all the participants were contacted through these networks. I also conducted fieldwork with migrants who were outside their networks. In total, I conducted thirty interviews,

sixteen in the UK, mostly in London, and fourteen in Brazil, in several locations. In the next section, I explain in more detail about the fieldwork conducted in the UK and Brazil, the participants' profile, and accessing the participants.

## **Phase 2: Fieldwork in the UK**

The fieldwork in the UK was conducted mainly in London. It started in May 2013 and continued until April 2014. During this period, I conducted sixteen biographical interviews, eleven at the participants' houses and five in other locations chosen by them, including a Brazilian coffee shop, a workplace and a square (see Appendix 4). After the 'formal interview', I conducted some follow-up informal visits and conversations at the participants' houses, and wrote my observations in my field diary. Seven participants filled in a daily diary for one month (see Appendix 4).

### ***The profile of the research participants in the UK***

Getting started in empirical research requires deciding who to involve in the research and why. The choices and decisions have to be made in the context of the purposes and design of the research (Alaszewski, 2006:49).

Informed by my preliminary experiences during my work at Casa do Brasil, AMBE's meetings, the Oxford University project (THEMIS) and GEB's surveys, I chose to focus on the Brazilian migrant women's narratives, as the main participants of this research. As previously mentioned, during my 'pre-fieldwork' experience I noted that the Brazilian women constantly discussed their activities, practices and negotiations done with their family members in Brazil. Thus, to narrow down the research field and give more depth to the experiences of the Brazilian migrant women, I chose to focus on their construction and reconstruction of transnational family practices. I chose Brazilian migrant women who had lived in the UK for a long period. This was a research tactic to get a longitudinal (historical) perspective of the transformations in family practices and relationships over their years of migration and life course. As the literature on Brazilian migration to the UK has already revealed, the first Brazilian migrants arrived in the late 1980s and 1990s in the UK (see Chapter 1), thus I targeted participants who had moved to the UK in that period.

As previously mentioned, the first Brazilian migrant women in the UK were constituted mainly by middle and lower middle classes. They usually had high levels of education, were employed in Brazil before moving to the UK, and did not see their

migration as a definitive project (see Torresan, 1994, 1995; Cwerner, 2001; Kubal et al., 2011).

The participants of this research could be framed in this profile of Brazilian 'pioneers'. However, it is important to highlight here, as Torresan (2007) has argued, the notion of the middle class in the case of Brazilians is a relative, contextual concept. Even though the Brazilian women studied here could be classed as middle class or lower middle class when they left Brazil to live in the UK, and though their consequent social conditions were not of complete vulnerability, with their migration not being essential for the subsistence of their family in Brazil, they could not be classed as a 'privileged' and 'cosmopolitan' elite who could easily move around the globe (see Amit, 2007, on this debate). As Conradson and Lathan (2005) affirm, they could be seen as 'middling transnationals'.

Indeed, they belonged to a middle class or lower middle class in Brazil that in the 1980s and 1990s, due to the severe economic and political crisis of the country, faced strong difficulties with personal emancipation. As I have shown in Chapter 1, this was strongly felt, particularly by the young women who had historically just started to consolidate their active participation in the labour market in Brazil (see Matos and Borelli, 2012; Bruschini, 1994). Moreover, their migration movement to the UK was not done in isolation, but with a network of family (brothers, uncles, aunts, cousins) and friends, who had lived or were living in the UK.

The main destination city was London. From the total of sixteen Brazilian migrant women interviewed, all had lived in London, and at the time of their interview fourteen were living in London in various boroughs (such as Haringey – Seven Sisters; Brent – Kensal Rise and Harlesden; Newham – Stratford; Hammersmith; Ealing – Acton Town; Barnet – East Finchley; Westminster; Islington – Finsbury Park) and two were living in the outskirts of London (Gerrards Cross and Surrey). Two had lived for a while outside London in other UK cities (Birmingham and Cardiff), but had later returned to London. With regard to region of origin, the majority were from the southeastern and southern states of Brazil, including São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul, in various cities.

One of the eligibility criteria for the research was that the participants had been in the UK for more than ten years, and thus would have faced long periods of separation from their families in Brazil and would also have been through the various technological transformations, which could mark how they had constituted and re-

constituted their transnational family practices. Consequently, the ages of my research participants ranged from 38 to 54 years old and, regarding the length of stay, the majority had arrived in the UK in the late 1980s and 1990s, while three participants had come in the early 2000s. At the time of the fieldwork, eleven were married (four to Brazilian spouses, four British, one German, one Pole, one South African); two were divorced; one was divorced and co-habiting with a partner; one was single; and one was a widow. Eleven had their children living with them, most with two children, and one participant had a son living in Australia.

Regarding work experience, as the participants had been in the UK for a long period they had had several occupations. At the start of their migration, although most of them had a high level of education and, in some cases, had good English language skills before leaving Brazil, they were all incorporated into 'traditional female' occupations, such as domestic work or catering services (Boyd and Grieco, 2003). This trend corroborated other migration studies, which showed that migrants tend to have downward mobility (Chiswick et al., 2002), and in the case of women migrants, they tend to occupy gender-divided labour market niches (Boyd and Grieco, 2003).

The participants reported a very similar working pathway. Twelve of the participants' first job was as a cleaner; one was an *au pair*. Eleven of the twelve cleaners had worked as a waitress after or at the same time as they were working as a cleaner. After working as a cleaner or waitress, three reported working as an interpreter in a hospital or other health sector, and four worked as sales assistants or supervisors. By the time of the fieldwork, only two were still doing cleaning jobs to supplement their income as they had other major roles, and five were teachers (three in primary school, the other two in colleges). The other participants had various occupations, such as dentist, director of a charity, and secretary (see Appendix 4).

It was clear that for most of the participants, moving to the UK involved a 'de-skilling' process in comparison with their occupations in Brazil. In some cases, after being in the UK for a long time they had got close to acquiring a job position which could be considered, in terms of status, similar to the ones they had in Brazil or equivalent to their level of education and qualifications. However, it was also observed that most of them, even after many years in the UK, were still doing jobs that did not correspond to their level of education and experience. In some cases, their job conditions were precarious, unstable or temporary (short-term contracts).

Regarding accommodation, as happened with the work experiences, the situation had changed over the years. At the start of their migration trajectory, almost all of the participants reported sharing accommodation with several people, Brazilians and non-Brazilians. Some recalled sharing a bedroom with two or three people. One participant said that she had lived in a house with two elderly people for most of the period she had been in the UK. She had helped to take care of them, and only moved out after they passed away. At the time of the interviews, the participants were living in small rented flats, or houses, which they shared with their partners and children, or lived by themselves in a studio or one-bedroomed flat.

Finally, regarding migration status, the participants had a range of different migration statuses over their years of migration. At the start of their migration, the majority of the participants held tourist and/or student visas. Most of them reported renewing their student visa several times, until it changed to a permanent visa. It is important to note that, although nine of the participants at the time of the interviews had a British passport and five had Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR), the process of acquiring such status, which allowed them more mobility, had occurred during their migration trajectory. In some cases, the permanent status (ILR) was acquired five or six years after moving to the UK, and in other cases it took a number of years to reach this migration status. Only two participants at the time of the fieldwork had no permanent migration status; one had a dependent visa through her husband's working visa, and one was waiting for a residence card.

### ***Accessing and interviewing research participants in the UK***

Starting my fieldwork in the UK, mainly London, with Brazilian migrant women who I had already interviewed on the Oxford University project (THEMIS) facilitated my access to the research participants. As the research was aimed at a specific profile of Brazilian women who had been in the UK for more than ten years at least and had family members in Brazil, the snowball technique was the most suitable method to access participants. Being introduced by someone they already knew made the other participants feel more comfortable about agreeing to take part in the research and talking about family issues.

In order to conduct the ethnography research, I made myself available to go to the participants' houses. However, it was not an imposition. I suggested that I could

meet them at their houses, and I explained it was important to the research, but they were free to choose the place for the meeting. The participants tended to feel very comfortable about inviting me to their houses, in fact, all welcomed me with lunch, or coffee, tea, cake and biscuits.

Eleven of the sixteen interviews were held at the participants' houses. Two interviews were conducted in public places, but I went to the participants' houses for a follow-up conversation later on. One of these interviews was in a Brazilian coffee shop and the other in an open square (the participant requested this location because it was a rare beautiful sunny day). One interview took place in the participant's art studio. This place was full of family memories and objects; such as gifts from her parents which she carefully showed me. There was also a computer which she told me she used to talk to her family. In this case, even though the interview did not happen at the participant's house the place was still personalized.

At the participants' houses I could engage with them beyond the interview time. In some cases, I was invited to have lunch or dinner with the participant and sometimes their local family. At their houses, usually before and after the interviews, there were long conversations which sometimes lasted longer than the actual interviews. In some cases, other members of the household (husband, children) also participated before and after the interview conversations. The participants showed me photos of their relatives in Brazil and sometimes told stories relating to the photos or objects on display or on the computer. I spent, on average, more than five hours in the participants' houses.

Regarding the interviews, the general structure was in four parts (see Appendix 1). It began with a general profile of the participant (name/pseudonym, date and place of the interview, age, marital status, children, educational level, occupation, the year that they moved to the UK). The actual interview started with an open question (SQUIN). As mentioned above, the interview design was inspired by the biographical-narrative perspective (BNIM). I therefore started the interview with an open question, asking the participants to tell me their life stories in Brazil before coming to the UK, and afterwards in the UK. While they were narrating their stories I did not interrupt them with any questions. I just encouraged them to carry on speaking, with the use of non-verbal and paralinguistic expressions (smiles and nods) to demonstrate my interest and attention. During the whole interview, I tried to encourage them to tell

their stories by using expressions such as ‘could you tell me more about it?’ or ‘how/when did it happen?’

In the first part of the interview the participants generally tended to cover their past family experiences in Brazil and their arrival in the UK. It was important to help the participants to engage with the interview freely and also to bring their memories to life. After talking for 20 to 30 minutes without any interruption, the participants would ask me for the next question, as they felt they had exhausted that topic. I therefore asked them questions to clarify some of the points they had already mentioned, or topics connected to stories they had told.

At this point I initiated the second part of the interview, where I explored the participants’ employment, accommodation arrangements and leisure activities as well as changes in their migration status over the years in the UK. In most of the interviews, these topics were mentioned spontaneously, without my intervention, in the first part of the interview. The second part was therefore important to go deeper into their experiences and better understand them.

While the first two parts were designed to understand the participants’ migration process, the third part of the interview was the most substantial and the core of the interview. It was in this part that I asked for in-depth information on their family relationships and practices constituted and reconstituted with their relatives in Brazil.

This part was divided into two sections. First, I asked them about their interaction experiences with their family in Brazil at the beginning of their migration process, and then I asked about their family interactions after the incorporation of new communication and information technologies. The means, frequency, places, protagonists of communication, family events, emotions and feelings were all categories explored in this part. In this third part of the interview, I asked them, more specifically, about family practices created and recreated at a distance (e.g. material exchanges such as remittances, gifts and events, as well as asking about visits on family occasions). It is important to note that some of these topics had already been mentioned in the first and second parts of the interview, as the interview did not follow a rigid structure of questions and answers. If some of the questions in this part had been discussed previously, I did not return to them, unless there was some query or I thought it was important to explore further.

The final section of the interview was composed of reflexive questions and covered their future perspective on their transnational family – if they intended to



return to Brazil, what would make them return, and how they felt about it. At this point, the interviewees appeared very reflective about their migration process. They reflected on their migration trajectory as well as their life course engagement with their family members, particularly regarding moments of death. At these moments their narratives became very emotional.

After the interviews, I decided that to get a more precise idea about the participants' interactions and practices with their family members in Brazil, I could make use of the diary technique. In January 2014 I contacted all the participants by telephone or text message and invited them to write a diary where they should describe their interactions with their family members in Brazil, for a month.

Seven participants agreed to write a diary, so I met them and gave them a short explanatory letter about what the diary was, the research aim of this technique and a notebook (see Appendix 3). Those who chose not to do the diary cited a lack of time, travel arrangements, and willingness for further conversation, but not writing. After a month, I contacted them to collect the diaries, and we met to talk about the diary experience. Some participants wrote long, descriptive and detailed entries while others made it in the form of a table, dividing it into columns and rows, with the date (rows) and the means of communication, people, local issues, and how they felt during and after the communication (columns).

In the follow-up conversations, or written at the end of the diary, they reported a self-reflection about their interactions with their family members in Brazil. They reported that writing the diary had been a very revealing experience for them, as they noticed how often they interacted, with whom they predominantly interacted, and the activities and issues they shared. Natalia, a 42-year-old living in the UK since 2000, for example, wrote at the end of her diary.

*Sunday, (02/03/2014)*

*Dear Tania,*

*Sorry that my answers are so similar. When I read this diary at the end, I had to laugh. My feelings are almost the same, and basically I only speak with Ana [sister] (he he he). I hope it can be of some help. (Natalia's diary).*

Therefore, the fieldwork I conducted in the UK was a rich and co-produced process that developed over several months and allowed a close engagement with the participants. The choice of techniques used was important as it meant meeting up with the participants more than once, and it enabled the development of continuous and

friendly relationships. Establishing this trust relationship was fundamental to the next step of the research, the fieldwork in Brazil.

### **Phase 3: Fieldwork in Brazil**

I conducted the fieldwork in Brazil over a period of nine months between May 2014 and January 2015, in four different Brazilian states (São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Santa Catarina and Minas Gerais) where the family members of the Brazilian migrant women interviewed in the UK lived. In total, I conducted fourteen biographical interviews with family members (six mothers, one father, three brothers, three sisters and one sister-in-law) of seven Brazilian migrant women.

#### ***Profile of the research participants in Brazil***

The participants in Brazil were selected based on their availability and interest in taking part in the research. After finishing the fieldwork in the UK, I asked the Brazilian migrant women participants to contact their parents and/or siblings overseas and ask them if they would participate in the research. From the sixteen participants, I received eleven positive answers that their family members in Brazil were interested in taking part in the research. Unfortunately, two of the mothers who had agreed to take part in the research suddenly died during the fieldwork process. I had intended to contact other family members (such as local children), but the participants in the UK felt they might be too emotional to talk about family issues after their loss. Another two family members who had agreed to take part in the research were ill when I contacted them. One of the fathers had to have surgery and one of the mothers, who had cancer, was hospitalized during the fieldwork. In the father's case, I was able to interview one of his daughters. In another two cases, the mothers' dementia was problematic in conducting the interviews, but they were willing to talk even though sometimes they were confused and continually repeated themselves. I counted these last two interviews as a valuable experience to get a better sense of how the participants' daughters in the UK faced such interaction. Thus, from the eleven acceptances, I interviewed seven families in Brazil. In total there were fourteen interviews, as I interviewed more than one member of some families (see Appendix 4).

The age range of the parents was 65 to 85 years old, and the majority of the

siblings were between 40 and 60. The mothers interviewed were nearly all widows (5) with only one whose husband was still alive. All the parents lived near to at least one of their children; one lived in the same house as their child; in another case, the child (a 53-year-old son) had just moved from his mother's house but still lived close by; and one parent had a live-in carer, with her son also living in the neighbourhood. The siblings were either married with children (3) or single with no children (3). With regard to visits, only two family members said they had never gone to the UK.

It is worth noting that as the interviews were conducted at the participants' houses, in many cases other family members joined in the conversation, usually after the 'formal' interview. Sometimes sisters-in-law or brothers-in-law, or even nieces would comment about a particular situation or recall a story. These informal conversations usually took place during lunch or coffee times that the participants invited me to before or after the interviews. Thus, the number of family members that actually participated indirectly in the research was considerably larger than the total number of interviews.

### *Accessing and interviewing the research participants*

I travelled to Brazil in May 2014, and once in Brazil I contacted the parents and/or siblings by telephone to arrange the day and time of the interviews. In addition, I made sure that my participants in the UK had contacted their parents and siblings previously, so that they had prior knowledge about the research and me. All the interviews were held at the participants' homes, and as all the participants lived far from each other, in different states and cities, it required a number of different arrangements (flight and bus tickets, accommodation), and a lot of time spent travelling between each location.

I decided to start initially in São Paulo state, my own state of origin. There, I conducted nine interviews (seven in São Paulo capital and two in São Paulo outskirts). Afterwards I went to Rio de Janeiro, where I had planned to interview two families. However, while I was there the mother of one of the participants, who had cancer, had to be hospitalized. I therefore interviewed just one family, a mother and her daughter who lived in the same house. From Rio de Janeiro, I went to southern Brazil, to Santa Catarina, a state where I interviewed the mother of one of my participants. Finally, I went to a small city in Minas Gerais to interview the father and mother of one of the

participants. It was a valuable interview that the couple decided to do together. I spent a long time with all the participants, in some cases the entire day, and they showed me letters, cards, small gifts they had been given by their daughter or sister, and souvenirs they had bought when visiting them in the UK.

The format of the interviews with the family members in Brazil was adapted from the interview guidelines for the participants in the UK. It was structured in four core parts (see Appendix 2). It began with a general profile of the participant (name/pseudonym, date and place of the interview, age, marital status, children, educational level, occupation and family relationship to the migrant – mother, father, sister, brother). Then the first part started with an open question (SQUIN), asking the participant to tell the story of their daughter's or sister's migration process to the UK. As happened in the interviews with the Brazilian migrant women participants, at this first point of the interview I did not interrupt the interviewees. In fact, I tried to encourage them to talk as long as they wanted, by only using non-verbal expressions.

The second part was thus only initiated when they stopped talking. For this part I asked questions about topics they had mentioned in the first part. It was an important part of the interview as the Brazilian family members in some cases recalled the same stories already told by the participants in the UK. The third and fourth core parts of the interview were concerned more specifically with transnational family practices created and recreated by them with their daughters and/or sisters at a distance.

After my fieldwork in the UK and Brazil, which was a long journey of accessing and interviewing participants spread over long distances and multiple locations, the research reached its fourth phase – the data analysis and writing-up.

#### **Phase 4: Analysing the data and writing-up**

As suggested by Bryman and Burgess (1994) qualitative analysis is a continuous process which involves going back and forth into the literature, research design and the participants' life stories. It is a 'creative process' (Kitchin and Tate, 2000:239) of almost endless knitting and crafting of ideas, concepts and life experiences. Nonetheless, in the research, particularly in a PhD, there is a moment when this process needs to be framed, organized and put into words. It is a moment, according to Clifford and Marcus (1986) and Atkinson (1990), when the researcher

exercises their authority by modelling the text in order to address its possible readers' requirements. The writing process, thus, as Back (2013:179) argues, 'involves finding an aesthetic or a style that you feel comfortable with' and that also addresses the scholarship requirements. In this section, I disclose how I put together the research (literature review, participants' life stories, analysis, and aesthetic presentation of the research).

First of all, I transcribed the interviews in full from the original recordings and imported them to Nvivo (2009) for coding according to the main interview themes. The coding process was extremely laborious and time-consuming. The computer software was helpful in the initial process, but later on in the process of analysis and writing I started marking the interviews with different coloured pens by hand, as it seemed to me that in this way I was once again closer to the participants' stories and I was able to craft them in more depth (Mills, [1959] 2000).

As the entire fieldwork was conducted in Portuguese, I first analysed the participants' stories in the original language, and it was only after coding and in the process of writing that selected quotes were translated into English. The process of transcribing and coding was remarkably important in order to recognize previously un-noted features of the interviews. The transcripts were then organized into separate files, according to the location of the fieldwork – the UK or Brazil.

I, first, identified the Brazilian migrant women's profiles in terms of age, place of birth, marital status, how long they had been in the UK, civil status, work experience in Brazil and the UK, level of education in Brazil and the UK, and countries where they had lived. I also identified the family members in Brazil and in the UK mentioned by them during the interviews (see Appendix 4). Regarding the family member interviews in Brazil, I identified their kinship with the Brazilian migrant women in the UK (mother, father, brother, sister), their profile (age, marital status, children, region of origin, professional occupation) and if they had been to the UK to visit the migrant kin (see Appendix 4).

I then read the interviews and started revising and coding mainly the elements that the Brazilian migrant women in the UK had highlighted as constitutive of their relationship with their family members in Brazil over their years of prolonged geographical separation. My early writing gave a chronology of their stories, in a very descriptive way. It was the beginning of ordering the participants' stories. It was an

important part of the analytic process, as it brought together key ideas in a relatively unstructured way. These drafts, often incomplete, were then packaged and discussed with my supervisor. I should stress that the development of an analytic framework for my research owes much to insight gained from meetings with my supervisor, discussion with scholars in the UK and Brazil during seminars, conferences and workshops, and my personal experiences of interacting transnationally with my own family members in Brazil. These experiences were crucial interventions at this stage, and the outside suggestions offered interpretations that my more involved eye couldn't see, as observed by Hughes (1994).

At this point, I noticed that the Brazilian migrant women stressed 'doing family' with their family members in Brazil mainly through ritualizing family practices and family rituals at a distance. They highlighted some practices as constituting their family time at a distance, and they described such practices as having ritualist features. The participants of this research affirmed that it was important for them to create and recreate family rituals at a distance to feel part of their family's life in Brazil and to (re)create their sense of familyhood. This was a turning point in the analytic process as this insight led me to reorganize my empirical material.

I decided to first map the family practices that they emphasized as connecting them with their family members back home in Brazil, monthly, weekly or daily, and the ritualist features of these practices. Second, I shortlisted the annual family rituals that the Brazilian women migrants most mentioned practising with their family members in Brazil. Birthdays and Christmas were the most mentioned ones. Finally, I wanted to check how the participants of this research did the life-cycle rituals, as family rituals, from a distance.

As a result, my education on ritualization and family rituals had to begin beyond the disciplinary boundaries of transnational families. I therefore turned to the literature on rituals in general, and family rituals in particular (see Chapter 2). In this process, the work of several authors such as Morgan (2011b), Turner (1969), Bell (1992, 1997), Gillis (1996), Cheal (2002, 2008), Wolin and Bennett (1984), Imber-Black and Roberts (1998), Fiese et al. (2002), Baxter and Braithwaite (2006), and Costa (2011) turned out to be key texts in developing my knowledge of ritualization and family rituals, which directed the analytic framework of this thesis. Having gained knowledge from reading widely about these subjects I was able to return to my participants' stories with a fresh vision. As Hughes (1994:42) affirms:

[...] the analytic process involves both the reading of raw data and the application of concepts which have arisen from outside of that data.

For the purpose of organizing the empirical data described by the research participants, I created three empirical chapters, including in them a series of tables summarizing and synthesizing the main research findings of each chapter. The tables were divided into: 1) arrangements, frequency; 2) content; 3) participants (gender and age); 4) capacity or opportunity of ‘doing family’; 5) symbolic meaning and affective feelings involved in the activities reported. These features were important to my analysis throughout this thesis. But besides the features and organization, the analysis still involved a large creative process that was developed through drafting and redrafting of the thesis (Schiellerup, 2008).

### **3. Fieldwork challenges**

Although I had easy access to my participants in the UK and in Brazil, my fieldwork was not without its challenges. While, in London, the fieldwork developed without great practical and logistical difficulties, apart from the usual arrangements of dates and times with people’s busy lives, in Brazil I faced more difficulties due to the long distances to travel, the expense and the logistics. Although I am Brazilian and was familiar with the fieldwork locations and the language in Brazil, the challenges were still much greater than the ones I faced in London. As the research start point was Brazilian migrant women in the UK, and then their family members living in Brazil, those were located in several different places (states and cities). Thus, I had to travel from city to city and pre-arrange my visits, transportation, and accommodation etc.

As a few of the interviews were in São Paulo capital, which is a city of eleven million people, lacking good public transportation, the logistics of travelling to the people’s houses called for long journeys in the city. As a female researcher, I also had to be mindful of the timing of the interviews, as being a woman alone in the streets of a big city (e.g. São Paulo or Rio de Janeiro) late at night can be risky. It is important to emphasize at this point that transnational family fieldwork is usually a very time-consuming process for an individual researcher, as observed by Boccagni (2010).

In addition to the logistical and practical challenges posed by a transnational family study, approaching intimate issues and, particularly, using a method based on a biographical interview, raised emotional challenges not previously anticipated. During my fieldwork in London, I got close to one of my participants during her interview, and as we talked for a long time, particularly focusing on her life story, at the end of her interview she revealed to me that she was facing a very difficult time in her life, as she was suffering domestic violence. Even though my research did not cover this issue, as a piece of research with women I should have predicted that such a revelation could occur<sup>22</sup>. However, I found I was not really emotionally prepared to deal with such a revelation when it in fact happened. Following the guidance from workshops I had attended, which dealt with research challenges, I offered her the telephone numbers of Brazilian non-profit organizations (e.g. AMBE and Casa do Brasil) which could help her. Afterwards, we kept in touch and exchanged a few messages, but she broke off the communication, and I never found out if she actually went to any of these organizations to ask for help.

In the case of the Brazil fieldwork, I had to face two extremely emotional challenges – interviewing ageing parents and dealing with the death of potential interviewees. Researching transnational families from a longitudinal perspective led to making contact with some parents in Brazil who were very old and fragile, and some had dementia. Despite recognizing the importance of giving a voice to people with dementia, and wanting to include their narratives rather than those of proxies, as stated by Wilkison (2002), it proved very difficult. It was a challenge to access and interview the parents with dementia, as they were usually ‘protected’ by their locally based children, and somehow prevented from talking by themselves. The inequalities of power were evident in this relationship (parents and children) and I felt myself powerless to disrupt such an established relationship, as insisting on an interview with the parent would have broken the entire process of trust built up during the research. Thus, in those cases, I could only engage with them by exchanging a few words and asking a few questions, but then the answers were usually finished by their children.

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<sup>22</sup> A topic approach by McIlwaine (2010) about Latin American women.



Another inevitable fieldwork research challenge regarding transnational families, which was not previously anticipated by me, but is implicitly obvious, is that life continues its course as the research develops. Although the research is a portrait of a period, past and present, the present develops during the research and can cause transformations to it. Two of my participants' mothers, for example, died suddenly during my fieldwork. Both cases were unexpected deaths, as their mothers were not suffering from any long-term illnesses, but life took its course anyway. In one case, I found out about the mother's death via a Facebook post, and immediately contacted the participant. In the other case, the participant told me when I went to collect her diary. In both cases, I engaged with them in their pain and was sensitive to their loss. Because of these incidents, I realized that the research process is much more than just describing and analysing life experiences, and is itself constituted by the life experiences – as life does not stop in order to be researched. As Reason (2003: 205) notes:

In a science of persons, all those engaged in the inquiry process enter the process as persons, bringing with them their intelligence, their intentionality, and their ability to reflect on experience and to enter relations with others – and, of course, also their capacity for self-deception, for consensus collusion, for rationalization, and for refusal to see the obvious that also characterizes human beings.

Therefore, 'a valid science of persons must engage with human beings as persons' (Pearce, 2010:05). In this vein, in the next section, I reflect on the ethical considerations of this research and the notion of co-production (Fabian, 2014; Pels, 2014; Ingold, 2014; Keith, 2013; Pearce, 2010 and Orr and Bennett, 2009). This thesis can be seen as the outcome of a co-production process, which entailed my close involvement with the theme, the research participants, and my own positionality as a researcher and author. All these elements, clearly, reflect on the participants' involvement, accounts produced and on the writing of the thesis.

#### **4. Research ethics and the co-production research process**

Ethical decisions arise throughout the entire research process, from conceptualization and design, data gathering and analysis, and report, and literature on the topic reflects this (Edwards et al., 2002:19).

I submitted my study to Goldsmiths College, Department of Sociology Research Ethics Committee before starting my fieldwork in London and Brazil, and it

was granted approval. During my fieldwork I continued the ethical approach by applying the principle of informed consent. I first informed the participants about the research in the initial contact by telephone and then I fully explained about the research before the interview started and how the information obtained would be used. The participants' consent was obtained verbally and kept in the records.

I informed the participants that I was the only person who was going to listen to the records, and what they told me in the interviews would be erased from the recording device later and kept only in my computer for the purpose of my PhD research. In addition, I informed the participants that they were free to withdraw or stop the interview at any point and I also informed them about protection of their anonymity, as I would change all their names. As family issues are usually treated as private, I thought it was essential to emphasize their anonymity, but to let them know that they would probably recognize their own personal stories. Providing them with this information, I believe helped to gain the participants' trust and meant the interviews were very fruitful. Moreover, it also helped to leave an 'open-door' for follow-up conversations.

Besides following ethical concerns at the fieldwork stage, this study also took into account, as noted by Birch et al. (2002), that ethical concerns can arise at all stages of the research process. Indeed, ethical considerations are much more wide-ranging and should also include empirical and theoretical choices. In fact, ethical concerns permeate the whole research process. Birch et al. (2002:1), in their feminist approach, state that 'the complexities of researching private lives and placing accounts in the public arena raised multiple ethical issues for the researcher'. Hence, in this research, I took into account ethical concerns during the fieldwork and the data analysis and writing process. As Doucet and Mauthner (2002: 125) state, researchers do not just create a relationship with the research participants, rather ethics relates to a wide sense of 'acting responsibly' and involves accountability. Researchers also have an obligation and commitment to 'those who read, re-interpret and take seriously the claims that we make'. Therefore, the researcher has to be aware of their role and positionality during the fieldwork, as well as at the stages of analysis and writing.

Marcus (1998), for example, affirms that the researcher's identity cannot remain hidden, solid and intact in the study of the 'other'. Thus, it is worth noting how my

proximity to the participants (in some cases as friends) and my identity as a white Brazilian middle-class woman migrant living in London and having family members in Brazil, at some points facilitated areas of the narrative of the participants, while some other areas of their personal life might have become more difficult to disclose. My research was, as Caputo (2000) and Pink (2000) say, ‘close to home’ and with people who did not fit the category of ‘exotic’, at least not for me.

This thesis, then, was not the result of a unidirectional process, but of intersubjective encounters, and a long process which intertwined with my life. As I mentioned previously in this chapter, it started from the moment I took my first notes during my work at Casa do Brasil and in the THEMIS and GEB research projects. Later, during the PhD, this research was a co-produced process, which involved intersubjective encounters and subjective choices that defined the research issues, such as who to contact, my conduct at the participants’ houses and during the interviews, and writing the thesis.

According to Pels (2014), the notion of co-production of knowledge and intersubjectivity was historically constructed in the social sciences in two stages: the first, he affirms, was at the beginning of the twentieth century, when social science studies introduced the need to take a ‘native point of view’ as a starting point for the ethnographic method and the notion that it should be done by scientifically trained experts (e.g. Mallinoswki, 2005 [1922]); the second was in the 1970s and 1980s, when the reflexive scrutiny of Western classifications of ‘others’ became a necessary condition of research (e.g. Bourdieu, 1977; Said, 1978; Fabian, 1983; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Marcus, 1998; DaMatta, 2010).

In the first stage it was considered that the researcher should ‘go out there’ to take the ‘native’s view’. But it was still strongly informed by structural objectivity, which searched for ‘relational invariants’ (as for example in Levi-Strauss’s work). According to Fabian (2014:212), these studies were still aiming to understand the ‘rise of civilization, to confirm the working of natural laws of evolution, or to reveal patterns of the diffusion of culture’. Thus, Pels (2014) states that they still subscribed to the ideals of scientific objectivity. This perspective started to be questioned from the 1970s onwards, when the notions of co-production and intersubjectivity widely spread around the social sciences. These ideas shed light not only on the importance of ‘native’ subjectivity, but also the researcher’s subjectivity. Their aim was to overcome

the assumption that ‘true’ ethnographic knowledge was possible ‘if the subjectivity of the observer was erased as much as possible from the process of knowledge production’ (Pels, 2014:220). Fabian (2014) argues that from the 1970s onwards social scientists took recourse to the notion of intersubjectivity to think about epistemology as conditions of co-producing knowledge. Pels (2014) adds that these ideas emerged as part of an intellectual and political countermovement in the social sciences to the positivist heritage and as a way of responding to the postcolonial epistemological crisis.

According to Pels (2014), the ‘intellectual and political countermovement’ in the social sciences in the 1970s and 1980s was the result of important social scientist movements, and he gives particular importance to Bourdieu’s (1977) ‘theory of practice’ work, Said’s (1978) work on ‘Orientalism’, Fabian’s (1983) work on ‘Time and the Other’ and Clifford and Marcus’s (1986) work on ‘Writing Culture’. He states that these authors’ works challenged the scientific subject’s location as an ‘outside observer’, where the result of their work is ‘full’ objectivity. Instead, they were concerned with interpreting practices, and introducing into the object of study the principles of reflexivity and the relationship between ‘the observer’ and ‘the author’ (to use Morgan’s (2011b:05) terms). Thus, they affirmed that an object of observation and analysis is what the observer has made of it.

The seminal work, ‘*Writing Culture*’, by Clifford and Marcus (1986) was a critical revision of ethnographic writing and encouraged social scientists to rethink the processes of knowledge production. Clifford (1986:22) called for a ‘rejection of monological authority’ in research. He questioned the ethnographic authority, and posed questions such as: ‘How is it that ethnographers or anthropologists represent “natives”?’’, ‘What are the bases for ethnographers’ assumptions?’’, ‘How is it that anthropologists construct their objects?’ and ‘What are the strategies they employ?’ Clifford (1986:23). Such questions challenged the social scientists’ authority in the field and in writing it down. Clifford (1986) suggests that the entire research process is a set of constructions, resulting from different strategies as well as from specific historical and cultural consequences.

Such considerations have been taken into account in much more recent studies, as, for example, in Amit (2000), Caputo (2000), Knowles (2000) and Pink’s (2000) work ‘*Constructing the field: ethnographic fieldwork in the contemporary world*’. These authors show how their transnational identity as a researcher and their life

journey strongly influenced their choosing to study a particular subject, the location of their fieldwork – usually between their own home country and those of other research connections – and how the interactions made during their research could continue even after the end of the research, in some cases in the form of friendships.

Taking into account the above thoughts, I have reflected that my autobiography strongly led to the ideas and locations of this research. As previously mentioned, London was where I lived and Brazil is my home country. Moreover, as Ingold (2014) says, research is ‘alive’ and it is done ‘with people’ rather than ‘of them’. Thus, during my fieldwork I felt that my autobiography positioned me at some points as an ‘insider’ and at others I was considered an ‘outsider’ (Hampshire et al., 2012). I felt that I was an ‘insider’ in the fieldwork with the Brazilian migrant women, when all the interviews were conducted in Portuguese (even with the participants who spoke English), when we shared the same cultural codes, such as greeting with two kisses or one, depending on the Brazilian region, offering food or drink (usually a coffee), making time to receive the person, which are usually practices among Brazilians when inviting someone to your house. In addition, I felt like an ‘insider’ when the Brazilian migrant women repeatedly said phrases such as: *‘You know what I mean’*, *‘You know how things are there [Brazil]’*, *‘Migration is difficult, you know’*.

At those moments, I felt as if my own story that I had shared with them during the fieldwork was a point of connection between us. I believe that it probably shaped their accounts in revealing some very intimate family connections and feelings. For example, one participant recalled helping with her mother’s bowel constipation with her own hands, another spoke about her mother’s gambling problems, and another revealed being gay, a fact she had hidden even from her family.

However, there were moments that I felt like an ‘outsider’. I had not lived in the UK through the same historical moments as them. Thus, we had different migration experiences, regarding transnational family relationships and practices. It allowed me to ask more questions about their transnational family lives in the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s. As they knew I had not been living in the UK during those years, I noted that they spent more time explaining to me how they ‘did family’ during that period. In addition, I felt like an ‘outsider’ regarding the participants’ family relationships and practices. Only they were able to talk about their ‘inside’ family interactions and dynamics.

I felt the same about the fieldwork carried out in Brazil. Sometimes I felt like an ‘insider’ because I said I was like their daughter and/or sister – a Brazilian migrant woman in London with family members in Brazil. I noted that telling them about myself made the family members more open to talking about their experiences and family relationships constructed at a distance. On the other hand, I felt like an ‘outsider’ when I was not allowed to talk much to the elderly and fragile parents. Thus, I positioned myself as an ‘inside-out’ or ‘outside-in’ (to use Hampshire et al.’s (2012:341) terms in discussing research positionality).

Moreover, I noted that my research was the result of a continuous and co-constructed process of relationships between myself (a researcher) and the participants. For example, one participant’s sexuality as a lesbian was not revealed during our first encounter, but during our ongoing relationship. The stories shared with me, and those I shared with the participants made the research a continuous dialogue process. Some of them became my friends. In some cases, my relationships went beyond the research, as for example, helping at the time of their mother’s death. The relationships constructed allowed me to contact some participants not only during the fieldwork, but also during the writing of the thesis. At the time, I contacted some of the participants, asking for further information and material (e.g. copies of letters, Christmas and birthday cards). The thesis, then, is the result of such interactions, which do not occur just in isolated incidents (in the field).

I also recognized that if the research had been conducted by a person with a different background, for example someone of another nationality, a man, or a Brazilian who did not share the migration experience of being a female migrant with family members in Brazil, it is likely that the participants of this study would have added details in their responses in order to highlight some Brazilian specificity, that in my case was taken for granted. But, in this regard, I can only speculate, as I cannot divest myself of my own background and life history. In fact, merely by being present, talking and interacting, I had already revealed things about myself, from the way I looked, the way I talked, and the way I moved. In other words, the fieldwork, and the accounts (life stories) produced through it, could only be the result of my encounters with the participants, where we showed in our interactions many identity layers, for example as researcher and participants, Brazilian women, migrants, workers, newer arrivals or having lived in the UK longer, and so on.

As Hampshire et al. (2012:346) note, research is an ongoing ‘dialectical political-personal relationship between Self (researcher) and Other (interlocutor), which results in the coproduction of knowledge’. Therefore, I identified that the biographical accounts shared with me by the participants of this research were a result of my own biography, the stories I revealed about myself, the research aims and the relationships that we constructed. All the stories shared by the participants with me had a ‘truth’, which was a partial and incomplete result of our interactions and of my interpretation of them, passing through my own subjectivity and life experiences. The research accounts produced in this study, then, were specific to determined encounters, which happened in a specific time and space, producing dialogue constructed through my relationship with the participants.

I argue here that the research accounts (the life stories shared with me) are also subject to the ‘truth’ that I constructed about them in the writing-up process of this thesis. Clifford’s (1986) work, for example, goes beyond questioning the authenticity and reliability of narrative and ethnographic accounts, and he highlights the authority of the researcher in the writing process. In this light, the research is not only a ‘dyadic production among researcher and participants’ (Pels, 2014:224). The researcher has the authority in the writing of the research, as I showed in the previous section about the analytical process. Thus, while ‘in the field’ (in the participants’ houses) the power lay more with the participants, as they were in their own place and I was a ‘guest’, so they could tell the stories they wanted to disclose; in the writing process the power lies in the researcher’s hands.

As Atkinson (1990:33) affirms, the research process did not end with the fieldwork, ‘the sociologists still had to embody their scholarship in textual formats and styles’. In this sense the researcher needs to engage ethically with the analysis and the writing process (Doucet and Mauthner, 2002). Moreover, as Pels (2014) and Fabian (2014) state, there is still a ‘third person’ in the research process – the reader.

Therefore, I argue that the accounts or narratives disclosed in this thesis can only be seen as partial and relational, as a constructed process involving the participants, researcher and readers. The notion of ‘truth’ is relational, depending usually on who has the power in the specific research moments of time and space. In my fieldwork in the participants’ houses, their life-story narratives were the ones they wanted to reveal to me, at that particular time and moment. Even in my repeated visits, no real accounts can be considered to have been revealed, as it was a continued

relationship process of interaction in which new stories of family life were disclosed, but they were still the result of our relationship. In the more intense act of writing the thesis, the power of crafting it lay in my hands. So, in searching to construct a thesis, I wrote down the participants' biographies and narratives to form this study. Although I kept in contact with some of the participants during this process, the construction of the text, the format, the combination of words, and the long hours sitting in front of the computer, was my work alone.

However, as Pels (2014) and Fabian (2014) argue, the co-production process of research does not rely on a dyadic relation of researcher and participant intersubjectivity, but on multiplex social relationships and a struggle for recognition. Clifford (1986) and Atkinson (1990) have highlighted this issue, arguing that the writing process of a research study is the moment of responding to partners' scholarship. Thus, as a researcher, I experienced an ambiguous phase in the writing process. On the one hand, I was exercising my researcher authority towards the participants' biographies and narratives, by changing their order and fitting them into the aesthetic of the thesis. On the other hand, I was searching for scholarship recognition. Thus, this thesis does not intend to represent Brazilian women's transnational families in the UK, or claim any objective 'truth'. The empirical chapters that follow, and the narrative accounts included in them, are only a 'partial truth', co-produced in multiplex social relationships, which depend on several layers of subjectivity, positionality, biographies and power relationships.

### **Concluding remarks**

In this chapter I have discussed the methodological approach that I adopted for this study and described the different stages that were involved in this research process. While the first steps were based on my pre-fieldwork experiences, which involved my participation in research projects (such as THEMIS and GEB surveys I participated in as a researcher) and even my experiences of working and participating in a Brazilian non-government organization in London, overall this research is based on fieldwork conducted with Brazilian migrant women in London and their family members in Brazil.

My fieldwork was based on ethnography ideas and was conducted in Brazilian migrant women's houses in London, and in Brazilian family members' houses in



Brazil. In addition, this research includes biographical narrative interviews with Brazilian migrant women in London and their family members in Brazil and the writing of a diary by some of the Brazilian migrant women.

I have argued that the methodological framework design was important to address the main objectives of this research of capturing how Brazilian migrant women 'do' family with their family members in Brazil, their family relationships and the practices done. Moreover, the methodological approach allowed the research to be empirically based on the narratives of the lived experiences of the participants. At the same time, it helped me to not lose sight of the broader context and the social constraints in which their family life was constructed and reconstructed.

This chapter, then, along with the previous one, completes the scene-setting regarding finding out how certain Brazilian migrant women in London 'did family' with their family members in Brazil over their long periods of geographical separation. The next chapter is the first empirical chapter, which explores the narratives of the research participants. It aims to answer the question of how the Brazilian migrant women participants of this research in London 'did family' with their family members in Brazil, on a monthly, weekly or daily basis, from the beginning of their migration.

## Chapter 4

### Doing family on ‘small-days’

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Morgan (2011b) affirms that ‘doing family’ can involve a large range of activities. They are situational and depend on each family. He distinguishes that among family practices, there are family rituals. Those are usually important in the constructing and reconstructing of a sense of familyhood.

As I previously showed in the literature review chapter, family rituals do not exist in isolation, but have been historically, culturally, socially and even biographically constructed and reconstructed. Gillis (1996) shows that some family rituals have been constructed in ‘modern’ times. As they are constructed, they do not exist by themselves, but need for family members to create and recreate them as an important practice for their family. Morgan (2011b:120), along with other family scholars, shows that there are ‘family rituals which are associated with major life events (weddings, birth, funerals), others more informal such as birthdays or they may be simply family get-togethers’. The focus of this chapter is specifically on these last events, in contrast to the following chapters, which consider the other family rituals.

Family scholars, Wolin and Bennett (1984:410), have identified these events as ‘patterned family interactions’. The authors consider that these events are the most frequent enacted family practices. Consequently, they are the least consciously planned by the participants. According to them, they are practices which occur more frequently and are less planned and less recognized. Thus, they are also the most difficult to be identified by a researcher. The researcher needs to ask the family members what are their significant family practices on their ‘small days’, echoing Costa 2011: 95’s term, to family rituals less planned and more frequent. Only they can distinguish their ritualist family practices, the ones relevant to their construction of their sense of family.

The Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil noted in their narratives some of their ‘patterned family interactions’ (Wolin and Bennett, 1984:410) which were significant practices for them in order to construct their sense of familyhood from a distance. I engaged closely with the research participants’ biographical narratives and diaries to identify these practices.

Thus, in this first empirical chapter, I disclose the practices narrated by the participants of this research, which they identified as their main ‘patterned family interactions’ (Wolin and Bennett, 1984:410) - monthly, weekly or daily. I have also shown the ritualist features that they attached to these practices: recurrence, performance by and towards family members, the preparations, symbolic and affective meanings for the family, and the traces left to constitute the family memories and history. I have divided this chapter into two parts. In the first part, I highlight the practices which, according to the participants, were their family times of ‘getting together’ in the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s. In the second part, I show how they have ‘done family’ since the mid-2000s, highlighting the main practices which they identified as family time with their family members in Brazil.

In this chapter I argue that the participants of this study gave these practices some ritualist features which were important for them in constituting and reconstituting their sense of familyhood at a distance over their long years of separation through migration.

## **1. The writing and exchange of letters**

The writing and exchange of letters was narrated by the Brazilian migrant women of this research as their first family practice, and as a way of ‘getting together’ (Morgan, 2011b:120) with their family members in Brazil. They identified this activity as one of their main family times (Gillis, 1996), allowing them to interact with their family members in Brazil in the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s.

All the participants of this research were literate, so the writing and reading of letters was not difficult for them. Besides, at the time, the exchanging of letters was much cheaper than other means of communication, for example, the telephone. Lucia, a 50-year-old living in the UK since 1986, stated that: *‘at the beginning it was more letters...the telephone calls were too expensive, and people in Brazil did not have telephones at home at that time... neither did I’* (Lucia, 27/05/2013).

***Recurrence: every week, fortnight or monthly***

Establishing a frequency of writing and exchanging letters was considered by the Brazilian migrant women as important to create a sense continuity in their family relationship with their relatives in Brazil. They reported that the writing and exchange of letters occurred within a defined period of time. It varied according to each family. Most of the participants recounted that they wrote to and received letters from their family members in Brazil, usually every week, fortnight or month. Zilda, a 50-year-old living in the UK since 1989, and her sister, Amanda (a 55-year-old living in Brazil) explained:

*We used to send letters every week, yeah, one week my father used to write and the next week I used to write. It was like that when she went there. And we did it for a long period (Amanda, 06/12/2014).*

Baldassar et al. (2007) found in their study about family practices at a distance that letters were usually sent on an exchange basis – when a letter was received there was a sense of duty to send one back as soon as possible. As ‘letters travelled at different speeds to and from different destinations, families had quite varied experiences of frequency in their communication’ (Baldassar et al., 2007:110).

In my study, the Brazilian migrant women said that their writing and exchanging of letters with their family members in Brazil did not occur on an occasional basis. It was distinguished by them as being an important recurrent practice with their family members in Brazil. For them, establishing regular ‘patterns of interaction’ (Wolin and Bennett, 1984:410) had the function of creating a ‘sense of everything being fine’. Thus, if the letters did not arrive at the expected time it would break the sense of ‘*everything is all right*’, and could lead to feelings of insecurity such as, ‘*oh, my God what has happened*’, ‘*maybe someone is ill and they do not want to tell me*’, ‘*did they forget me?*’. Thus, to have a pattern of interaction through letters was considered by the Brazilian migrant women as important in their ‘doing family’. Carla, a 38-year-old living in the UK since 2000, summed up this need:

*I expected a letter to arrive every fortnight or at least every month. If I spent fifteen days without receiving any letters I started to open my front door anxious to see an envelope from Brazil. If I did not receive any letters in a month, I got worried and ran to a public phone. But it did not happen. I always got information from Brazil. We had this agreement to write at least once a month. They always wrote to me (Carla, 13/06/2013).*

In addition to establishing a frequency of interaction, writing and exchanging letters was differentiated by these families from the practice of writing letters to the bank, or other institutions, because of its capacity to keep track of '*what was happening*' and '*not losing any information*' about the family life in Brazil, as well as describing their London life. The Brazilian women migrants usually told their family in Brazil about their work activities, described their accommodation, mentioned friends they had made, love relationships, and places they had visited or were planning to visit. Laura, a 50-year-old living in the UK since 1985, affirmed:

*I used to write letters telling them about the job I was working in, the guy I was dating, and describing the house I was living in. I used to tell them about my work colleagues and also about the friends I had made and about how London was. I sent pictures of tourist places. I wanted them to know what my life was like here. (Laura, 21/07/2013).*

Their family members in Brazil, meanwhile, would describe family issues occurring in Brazil. Amanda (Zilda's sister), for example, said her letters were like a diary, in which she used to write about what had happened during the week, such as where they went, what they ate, what the nieces and nephews had learnt, how the parents were. So the act of writing the letters and describing the Brazilian family's life to her sister was described as part of constructing family time with her sister, even from a distance, she explained:

*I used to write her a diary. It was much more than a letter. I used to write what had happened on that day. I described how everybody in the family was, what we had done, who was with whom, how the children were, everything... It was like that at that time, so when I was about to send her the letter I used to give it to my other sisters, to my brother and to my parents so they could add a few words and kisses (you know, we used to kiss the letters) and then I sent them to her (Amanda, 06/12/2014).*

Moreover, the Brazilian migrant women said that the practice of writing and exchanging letters was meaningful for them at that time because it allowed them to keep track of what was happening and was a way of keeping their feeling of '*saudade*'<sup>23</sup> under control. In this regard, Carla said: '*I used to write to them every week, I could not wait longer because I had to share what was happening here and I missed them a lot*' (Carla, 13/06/2013). Another participant, Zilda, supported Carla's account, saying: '*I used to write every week, no longer than every fortnight, I missed*

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<sup>23</sup> A popular Brazilian word which has been described as 'deeply yearning someone or something profoundly missed' (Duarte, 2005).

*them a lot, so I could not wait longer to write*' (Zilda, 23/07/2013). In the transnational family context of the Brazilian migrant women studied, the writing and exchanging of letters was seen as a 'special' moment, meaningful to their family, which they said helped them to 'control' their feelings of *saudade*. A feeling it was important to have as it expressed the importance to them of their family member relationships.

The Brazilian migrant women stressed that the practice of writing letters to family members in Brazil was a way of 'doing family' because of the special form of crafting them. They said that letters to their family members in Brazil required preparation and time spent thinking about the family members. The writing of the letters involved choosing the right quality paper, writing the letter in their best legible handwriting, and maybe sending pictures to illustrate the stories told in the letter and to show the children growing up. Patricia, a 41-year-old living in the UK since 1995, noted:

*We used to write long letters. I remember that I liked to buy paper that was beige and had no lines, and then when I was writing, I used to put a sheet with lines under this paper so I could write in straight lines. I also remember sticking pictures on the paper and describing where I was, the date I went to that particular place, and of course, at the end I used to draw a heart and kisses* (Patricia, 06/06/2013).

The crafting of the letters usually took some time. The Brazilian migrant women interviewed said that they usually used their day off or night-time to write to their family members. Some said that at the time of writing they felt a sense of a 'liminal-like' moment (Turner, 1982:64). They described it as time when they were transformed momentarily into daughters and/or siblings. It was described as a moment that linked them to their family in Brazil, even though very briefly, and only in their thinking. But, they had to 'step-out' of the moment and go back to their lives in London. Thus, to repeat this practice every month, fortnight or week was important to provide them with the feeling of connection, even for just a short time, once again.

Carla, for example, recalled that when she saw a letter waiting on her doorstep she knew that her mother or sister had stopped what they were doing and thought about her and given her their time by writing to her. Family members in Brazil, such as Mara (Lucia's sister) also recalled the moments of crafting the letters as time she dedicated to her sister.

*I remember spending hours in my bedroom thinking what I should write to her, so I started by writing about what I had done that week, and then I wrote a bit about our brother, and our mother, I felt connected to her in that moment, as we were together (Mara, Lucia's sister, 49 years old living in Brazil, 10/07/2014).*

However, not all family members in Brazil took part in the writing and exchanging of letters. In fact, some family members in Brazil were much more likely to take a leading role in writing and answering than others, and in this sense gender was important (Assis, 1999).

***Participants: Who writes and answers to whom***

Lucia recalled the letters she received from her mother: *'my mother used to write to me like once a month at least'*, but emphasized that she received much fewer letters from her father, explaining: *'My mother and my father were not married or living together. He had other family; we were his second family. So he used to write to me, but it was much rarer'*. She also noted that she wrote to and received letters from her sister: *'Yes... I used to receive letters from my mother, my father (sometimes) and I had lots from my sister'* (Lucia, 27/05/2013).

In the same vein, Carla recounted fondly the letters she had received from her sister. She showed me two, which she considered special ones. The first letter was hanging on a cork board and it was the first object I saw when I entered Carla's living room. She had received it from her sister when she arrived in London and she described it as very precious to her. She explained how it had helped her cope with difficult times in London, and that her sister kept sending her encouraging quotations (for example, biblical, spiritual and motivational ones). Carla's account discloses how she distinguished the letters of her sister by assigning symbolic and affective power to the letters, for her they had 'sacred' powers:

*My sister's letters were magical. She wrote quotations that helped me and fit what I was going through in London at the time. It was like magic. She sensed I was upset and her letters relieved my anxiety. So I always read the quotations she gave me. Look at this one (pointing to the cork board). It is like a lucky charm. It has helped me to be strong and carry on. (Carla, 13/06/2013).*

The second letter, she recalls, was special to her because it reinforced her sisterhood ties:

*I remember once my sister sent me a very beautiful letter and she ended with the sentence: 'do not stop writing to me because I am your only sister'. I thought it was so cute; 'I am your only sister', because she was feeling alone, as her only*

*sister was away. We have a brother as well, but we are **the sisters**.* (Carla, 13/06/2013, she put emphasis on these words).

This account reveals what Kluger (2011) describes as the ‘sibling effect’. He argues that siblings fulfil many roles for each other. According to him:

From the time we’re born, our brothers and sisters are our collaborators and co-conspirators, our role models and our cautionary tales. They are our scolds, protectors, goads, tormentors, playmates, counsellors, sources of envy, objects of pride. They help us learn how to resolve conflicts and how not to; how to conduct friendships and when to walk away from them. Sisters teach brothers about the mysteries of girls; brothers teach sisters about the puzzle of boys. Bigger sibs learn to nurture by mentoring little ones; little sibs learn about wisdom by heeding older ones (Kluger, 2011:12).

For Carla, the writing and exchanging of letters with family members in Brazil, besides the ritualist features of being a recurrent practice which enabled her to keep track of information and control her feelings of ‘*saudade*’, in the case of her sister they also left emotional and symbolic traces, working beyond the practical exchange of information. In fact, she said that her sister’s letters had a ‘magical’ power, linking her and her sister which were able to heal her pain. These particular letters mentioned by Carla worked for her as ritualistic objects, ‘totem-like’ (analogous to Turner, 1982:64’s ‘*liminal-like*’ notion), which for her functioned to mediate two poles – not the sacred and profane, but geographically separated poles.

Carla’s sister’s letters could be seen by someone outside of her family, such as myself, as just banal objects, paper that she and her sister used to exchange information, but for her they were more than that. As they had been through the ritualist practice of crafting by a significant person (her sister), such a simple object (the letter) acquired a distinct ability to overcome its materiality and even heal her wounds. She kept the letters on display and explained that it was important that they were there on her corkboard because they could continue their function of healing her uncertainties, stress, fear and sadness. She therefore gave them a high value, which I also noted in the way she showed them to me, and held them in her hands and later near to her heart.

Although mentioned less by the Brazilian migrant women, in some cases fathers also played a leading role in the writing and exchange of letters. The difficulties of fathering from abroad are discussed by Pribilsky (2007) in his research on Ecuadorian migrant men living in New York, but not much attention has been given



to ‘left behind’ fathers’ participation in the constitution of family life at a distance (Fresnoza-Flot, 2014). Without question it has been largely documented that it is the women who take a much greater role in transnational family interactions, nevertheless it is also important to shed light on fathers’ participation, when mentioned in the fieldwork research. Zilda was the only participant who mentioned her father as the main family member in Brazil writing letters to her:

*My father was the one who wrote to me, not my mother. My sister wrote as well. He used to write the letter, which had around two pages, and then he would give it to my mother to read. Then she used to tell him things to add in the letter, and she also sent good wishes, missing you and kisses. But it was my father who used to write the letters. (Zilda, 23/07/2013).*

Brothers were not mentioned as having taken part in the writing of letters. Most of the information about the brothers and fathers was usually written by the mothers or sisters. Furthermore, none of the Brazilian migrant women mentioned the writing and exchanging of letters among extended family and friends as important to their ‘doing’ of family in the 1980s and 1990s. But although extended family members were not included in the practice of writing and exchanging letters, some participants reported that they took part in it indirectly, as explained by Amanda, Zilda’s sister.

*When a letter from Zilda arrived first we all read, read, read, and then we gave it to our cousins, aunts, uncles, grandpa so everybody read ... they also wanted to know how she was. (Amanda, 06/12/2014).*

To summarize, the common accounts were: ‘*Yes my mother used to write me letters*’ (Patricia, 06/06/2013); ‘*My mother and my young sister used to write to me*’ (Laura, 21/07/2013); ‘*I do not remember receiving a letter from my father, but he signed with my mother*’ (Angela, 10/02/2014). Thus, in this study the mothers and sisters of the Brazilian migrants living in the UK played the main role in the practice of writing and exchanging letters. But, it is significant to note that in one case it was the father who was the protagonist. Thus, the writing and exchanging of letters was done, among these Brazilian families studied, mainly by the adult women (mothers and sisters).

Nonetheless, the Brazilian migrant women said that the writing and exchange of letters with their family members in Brazil declined from the mid-2000s onwards, due to the incorporation of new communication technologies into their interactions with their families in Brazil. They said that this practice was gradually extinguished

from their family lives. However, the letters were preserved and they were distinguished by the participants (in London and in Brazil) by their capacity to act as proof of their family's interactions. They said that as they had been a ritualized practice – a recurrent performance of family members, involving preparation, a *'liminal-like'* moment (Turner, 1982:64) in the crafting, and could lead to becoming *'totem-like'* on display – they left symbolic and affective traces and meanings and could not be thrown away. They had become part of their family's constitution over a distance.

***Letters: family memories and history***

All of the Brazilian migrant women of this study confirmed that they had stored the letters they had received from their family members in Brazil: *'I still have them all'* (Carla, 13/06/2013). During my fieldwork at their houses, they showed me the letters stored in decorative boxes in their wardrobes or in specific places in the living room. Their family members in Brazil also showed me the letters that they had received from their migrant sister or daughter. They were also stored in boxes and placed in cupboards, usually in the living room. But, while they were stored and kept safe, the participants reported that they were not often opened and read. Zilda, for example, told me that she had stored all the letters she had received from her family in Brazil: *'I do not read them, but they represent my constant contact with my family'* (Zilda, 23/07/2013). As Madianou and Miller (2012:58) state:

[...] a letter is a physical object; it takes a decision to part with it, to throw it away. That is why people find it hard to discard their letters even when they are unlikely to ever read them again as the memories they evoke are too painful. And that is why it can be upsetting when significant letters get lost.

Although they may not read them, they do not throw them away. Thus, the meaning of the practice of writing and exchanging letters is transformed. For the Brazilian migrant women and their family members they came to signify their family proof of connection. As material objects the letters leave traces that can work as proof that, although they are living apart, they have not disrupted their family relationships. As Claudia said: *'I have always been in contact, not just now, but always'*. Thus, the ritualized practice of writing and exchanging letters has now been transformed into family memories and a significant part of their family history.



Figure 4.1: Zilda's letter box

Here, however, I do not intend to romanticize the practice of writing and exchanging letters. Although it was considered by the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil as one of the ways they did family in the mid-1980s, 1990s and early 2000s, despite being nostalgic about the 'old times', they recognized that doing family through letters was at times disappointing as it delivered 'old news' (Hamel, 2009; Madianou and Miller, 2012). Thus, it was not reported as being the preferred form for the Brazilian migrant women to 'do family' with their families in Brazil. For example, Laura stated:

*I used to describe my working experiences, the house where I was living, my love stories, and other facts about how I was living in a very detailed way, but by the time the letter arrived there and they answered me back, everything had changed, so it was very annoying. I was then not working in the same place, I was not living in the same house and I was not with the same guy. Everything had changed. (Laura, 21/07/2013).*

I argue here that the writing and exchange of letters produced in the group a feeling of circulation of ‘old news’. The letters had to travel over physical space which took a long time. Thus, the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil noted that, at that time they were living an asynchronous family life. The synchronization was in their thoughts, during the crafting of the letters, in their short ‘liminal-like’ moments dedicated to the family interaction. Nonetheless, Laura’s account is insightful because she compares letters to the newer forms of interaction. It gives her the perception of how the temporality of the letters created asymmetry between what was actually happening and what her parents were thinking was happening. This asymmetry produced a degree of disconnection and disappointment. So in order to overcome this, and create a more synchronic family time with their family members in Brazil, the Brazilian migrant women said that they started doing family by talking on the phone. They described it as a significant practice for them, and also gave it some ritualistic features.

## **2. Talking on the telephone**

### ***Recurrence: every fortnight or month***

The Brazilian migrant women in this study reported the practice of talking on telephone as one of their family times constructed with family members in Brazil in the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s. As with the writing and exchanging of letters, they narrated that they established a ‘pattern of interaction’ (Wolin and Bennett, 1984:410) of talking on the telephone with their family members in Brazil. It was not random, but could be negotiated and depended on each family’s arrangements. The day and time could vary, but usually a phone call with their family members had to be done at least once a month. In most cases, it happened every fortnight and usually at Brazilian afternoon or night time.

The recurrence of the interaction at a prearranged date and time, and the need to make such calls during this period, established a pattern of interaction for these families. It was highlighted by the participants as a distinguishing feature of the practice of telephone calls made among the family members. While a telephone call to someone ‘outside the family’ was not reported as having regularity, for the family

members in Brazil it was a necessity. It could not happen occasionally. For the family members there was a need to create a pattern. They mentioned it as being important to their interaction and contributing to their sense of familyhood over a distance.

Antonia, Patricia's mother, a 65-year-old living in Brazil, stated: *'We waited for her call; we knew she would call that week, so we waited, everybody used to wait'* (Antonia, 08/07/2014). Helena, a 45-year-old living in the UK since 1991, for example, recounted her interaction pattern with her family in Brazil in the mid-1990s:

*I called every fortnight. I missed them a lot and I also think I was left out of issues. I wanted to know what was going on, especially with my son. I had a one-year-old son, a month was a long period. It was difficult to remember everything to tell them and follow what had happened* (Helena, 08/05/2013).

She continued,

*My parents did not have a telephone at their house, so I called every fortnight in the Brazilian late afternoon or early evening, because I had to call my parents' neighbour* (Helena, 08/05/2013).

Although, this family reported they established a pattern to call every month or fortnight, in order to keep this pattern of interaction they had to make arrangements. However, it is important to note that this pattern was not rigid. It could be negotiable. But, once defined, it was important to follow it. The practice had to be negotiable, as the capacity and opportunities for the participants to do it were influenced by social constraints that they faced locally in London and in Brazil, as I will show in the next section.

### ***The capacity and opportunity to talk on the telephone***

Laura, Helena, Ana Clara and Lucia came to the UK in the late 1980s and 1990s, and they noted the high cost of international telephone calls to Brazil at that time<sup>24</sup>. They mentioned it as one of their main difficulties in making them to their families in Brazil. They said that it also influenced their interaction patterns being fortnightly or monthly. Helena said: *'in 1991, it was a fortune to call Brazil'* (08/05/2013).

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<sup>24</sup> See Reis (2010) about the history of telecommunications in Brazil.

Besides the high cost of international telephone calls, the Brazilian migrant women in London reported having to constantly prearrange and plan to call their family members in Brazil. They recalled that it was usually during their day off from work and some affirmed that it was a highly anticipated moment of their day. They recalled that having a family time with their relatives in Brazil on their day off helped them to mark the fact that they were not working. Some recalled that it provided them with a momentary sense of ‘interruption’ to their migrant life in London, mostly dedicated to working long shifts in restaurants and bars. Thus they transformed themselves back into sisters and daughters. Laura explained in detail about how it was in trying to telephone to Brazil:

*At the time, I used to work as a waitress assistant and cleaner and I used to receive a lot of coins. All the coins I received from my tips used to go into a bag. So, every fortnight I used to have a good amount of coins. Then, I used to organize myself to go to a phone booth, on my day off. I used to plan to call Brazil after 6pm, Brazilian time, because you knew people were probably at home. So, I used to walk, like, two or three blocks from where I used to live. It was in the main road, the phone booth. I remember walking the blocks carrying this bag full of coins. There we had to wait in a queue, most of the time it was raining, and I remember I was constantly worried about adding more coins so the telephone call did not end. And, of course, there was the noise of the street, people waiting with angry faces, if you took longer than 15 or 20 minutes, they started to become impatient. That was the moment I had to talk to them. Yes, it was like this, every fortnight, saving the coins, pre-arranging the day, going in the rain, and cold. (Laura, 21/07/2013).*

Some participants recalled that they used to search for ‘broken’ phone booths where international calls could be made for free. Ana Clara, a 46-year-old living in the UK since 1988, explained:

*At the time, it was common to find ‘broken’ telephone booths. There were some ‘broken’ [she made inverted commas with her hands, when she was talking] phone booths that all migrants knew about, especially Brazilians. These things spread by word of mouth (Ana Clara, 04/06/2013).*

Lucia and Helena, were also living in London at that time and remembered about the ‘broken’ phone booths all over the city and they explained how the telephone trick worked. Lucia said:

*There were some telephone booths in London that you could use for free. You had to know a combination of numbers or you could use a small box and attach it to the telephone. Then you could dial the number and talk for free (Lucia, 27/05/2013).*

Nevertheless, Helena remembered that even though she had used such ‘broken’ phone booths, it was a very uncertain way to talk and spend this so expected family time with her relatives in Brazil. She said: *‘It was difficult to rely on this to talk, because once the telephone company found out, they used to go and fix the phone. So we had to find another one’* (Helena, 08/05/2013). In addition, she explained that calling using such a trick produced mixed feelings of happiness and fear, because *‘it was illegal’*. At the time, she had only a student visa, so if she was caught doing it, she might be deported. Helena said that when using such tricks: *‘you were happy that you could talk with your family, but at the same time there was a fear of being caught and deported’* (08/05/2013). She added that there were always rumours of people who had been deported because of this practice. Helena said that after a while she started to become very afraid of doing it, so: *‘I used to go to such places only when I had little money’* (08/05/2013).

Another relevant point the Brazilian migrant women in London raised, which they recalled as influencing their capacity to have a family time with their relatives in Brazil with a telephone call was linked to the places where they had to go to talk in London in the late 1980s and 1990s.

They reported going to telephone booths where they had to face the cold and rain, and negotiate with other people, as mentioned by Laura. They complained about being ‘time limited’, ‘lack of privacy’ and ‘discomfort’ in these places: *‘the time was limited, because there were people waiting and sometimes we had to queue in the rain and cold’* (Juliana, a 46-year-old living in the UK since 1995, 09/12/2013). Elsa, a 54-year-old living in London since 1998, agreed: *‘It wasn’t comfortable to talk on booth phones, because in the street there was no place to sit, and usually there were other people waiting to use this phone’* (Elsa, 25/11/2013). Therefore, having to ‘do family’ by talking on the telephone in a public place came with a sense of frustration, because ‘on the street’ was not considered the place to do family. Elsa, for example, remembered:

*I had to go to the booth phone and I had to control my emotions. I had to be strong, but I missed them. I didn’t want everybody to see me crying, but I cried a little. I was going through a difficult time [she was unemployed], but she was right [her daughter] I should not cry on the street like a crazy woman, I had to be strong, not on the street. As she [her daughter] said, many people wanted to be where I was [in London]* (Elsa, 25/11/2013).

Elsa's account demonstrates that having a family time with her daughter 'on the street' gave her ambiguous feelings; she wanted to talk to her daughter, but it was unsatisfying because she felt very emotional but she had to control herself all the time. She affirmed: *'I could not lose control. I had to be strong, there were people around me'* (Elsa, 25/11/2013).

The phone booths in London, that were known across the world, were boxes with a door that could be closed, and different from the ones in Brazil that were open; they could give a sense of privacy, and protection from the rain and cold. Nevertheless, the fact of being 'on the street' as argued by DaMatta (1987), a place that Brazilians usually identified as impersonal and of individualist relationships, while 'the home' was personal, a place of cosiness, welfare, and support, made Elsa feel exposed, and thus it produced ambivalent feelings. It was the desired family time with her daughter, which somehow had to be shared with unknown people in the waiting queue and 'on the street'.

Indeed, the Brazilian migrant women's stories told to me about their practice of talking on telephone showed they considered that the locality of their family interactions mattered. They expressed a desire to interact with their family members in Brazil in more private spaces. They enthusiastically described when they were able to start calling in less public places, such as phone shops. According to Juliana, phone shops were better places to have family time than phone booths in the street. She said:

*Even though phone shops were public places, there you could feel in a more private place, and more private issues could be discussed. In these shops the telephones were in separate small cubicles. It was like the phone booths, but there you could sit down to talk and usually there were many cubicles, at least four or five, so there were not many people waiting. You would feel more comfortable as you were sitting down and also you knew there were no people waiting to use the phone. You could better enjoy the moment of talking with your family* (Juliana, 09/12/2013).

Vertovec (2004) argues that the emergence of international phone cards in the mid-1990s made the cost of an international call drop significantly and it was the first great transformation in the transnational connections of migrants, which he says increased with it. Brazilian migrant women, such as Juliana, Zilda and Amanda stressed the importance of international phone cards regarding the drop in cost of telephone calls to their family members and said that it changed their pattern of



interaction from fortnightly to weekly. Moreover, they highlighted that at the same time the emergence of phone shops and going to these shops with their international cards reduced the inconvenience of ‘doing family’ in the street. Juliana explained:

*It was much easier with the phone cards, because I could buy a card in the phone shop and go straight to the cubicle. They lasted longer than coins and were cheaper. [...] the possibility to talk more using international cards and to use them in phone shops allowed us to talk about many family issues. There was no need to hurry, and even more private and emotional issues could be approached in the conversation. I could start to call them every week. (Juliana, 09/12/2013).*

Amanda (Zilda’s sister) also highlighted this difference:

*[...] at the beginning it was very difficult. Zilda wanted to call every week and there was a time when she started doing collect calls every week, and my father and I paid for that, but it was too expensive, so I told her to call every fortnight. But, later, when telephone cards emerged, the communication improved and we could talk every week. (Amanda, 06/12/2014).*

Most of the Brazilian migrant women of this study reported that they did not have access to landlines in the places where they lived in the 1990s, but some did have landlines where they lived. Although, they said they preferred talking on the phone at home, rather than on the street, it was not totally without constraints. They still had to negotiate its use. For example, as Fatima, a 43-year-old living in the UK since 1996 explained: ‘when I first arrived I used to talk less. It was very expensive. It was £3.00 per minute. Where I lived had a landline, but the landlady of the house I lived in did not like us using the phone’ (Fatima, 03/06/2013). Fatima said that she could only use the house phone when the landlady was not in the house. According to her, the landlady used to complain constantly and control the duration of her calls. She stated:

*The good thing was that she used to travel a lot, so in her absence we could buy a phone card and use the telephone [landline]. But when she was there I used to go to a phone booth. (Fatima, 03/06/2013).*

Another of the Brazilian migrant women, Ana Clara, recalled that from the mid-1990s she had lived in several small shared houses or flats with five or more people. She said that in some of those places there was a landline. But it was usually located in the kitchen, which was the common area of the house, or in the living room, which was usually converted to a bedroom at night, which was a common practice among Brazilian migrants in London to minimize the high cost of the rent (see Dias, 2010, about accommodation arrangements). She said that even though she did not have

to face the difficulty of being in the street negotiating in public areas with other people, she still had to negotiate with her flatmates. She recalled having to tell them in advance that she would be using the phone, asking for silence and turning off the TV, and so on.

In sum, the Brazilian migrant women in London studied here reported various constraints that influenced their capacity and opportunity to have a family time with their family members in Brazil by making a telephone call, in the late 1980s and 1990s. They listed ‘macro’ facts such as the high cost of international calls and migration policies (visa restrictions), and meso/micro elements such as their migration conditions of sharing and/or constantly moving accommodation, unemployment or low-skilled employment, and having to negotiate with other people in public and private places.

While their London life influenced how the participants ‘did family’ with telephone calls to their family members in Brazil, their relatives in Brazil also told how their capacity to continue with it was very much linked to the local realities in Brazil, starting with the country’s lack of communication infrastructure and the high cost of landlines imposed by the Brazilian telecommunication companies between the late 1980s and 1990s.

According to Larangeira (2004), during this period the communication sector in Brazil developed slowly. The economic crisis of the so-called ‘lost decade’ (1980) delayed the government’s expansion plans which should have spread communication tools to reach all Brazilian regions, particularly countryside areas, where for example some of the Brazilian migrants’ relatives lived. Carvalho (2006) explains that the state-owned company TELEBRAS<sup>25</sup> monopolized the telephone system, and the inefficiency of the public services transformed landlines into luxury objects among Brazilians. In order to purchase a landline, Brazilians had to enter their names on long waiting lists which used to take up to five years (Larangeira, 2004). In fact, landlines were viewed as valuable property which could be sold or exchanged for other sorts of private property (such as a car), or even rented to other people.

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<sup>25</sup> Brazilian Telecommunication Company

Helena's mother (Amalia, a 73-year-old living in Brazil), who at that time lived in a small city in Brazil in the countryside of Santa Catarina, pointed out her limited capacity to call her daughter. According to Amalia, in order to communicate with Helena she had to rely on one of her neighbours. She explained:

*When Helena moved to England it was very difficult. We did not have a telephone. She used to call the neighbour, the only person who had a telephone, I think in the city. At the time, we were living in a neighbourhood where everyone knew each other. So, there was this neighbour who had telephone (landline) at his house and they knew Helena was living abroad. They were so kind doing what they did (Amalia, 19/01/2014).*

Helena explained that the neighbour used to run up the street to tell her mother she was on the phone. The neighbour's house was 30 metres from her parents' house. She described how the telephone call happened:

*I would first call my parents' neighbour, and I used to tell him, please could you call my mother, it is Helena. Then, I hung up the phone to wait for him to run to my mother's house and tell her I was on the phone. A few minutes later, like 10 minutes, I would call again to talk to my mother. (Helena, 08/05/2013).*

Helena continued:

*It was so difficult. I remember that sometimes my neighbour had to run in the rain to tell my mother, who stopped everything she was doing to follow him, carrying my son in her arms. I will be eternally grateful to them. I bothered them a lot. I bought many gifts for them, but what they did has no price. My mother knew it was not easy or cheap to make a phone call, so it was important, and everything else could wait. It was a special moment of the day, or even of the week, as the frequency of the phone call was usually every fortnight. Moreover, the call was usually not clear and often there were noises that made it difficult to hear. (Helena, 08/05/2013).*

Amalia's account corroborates this:

*I remembered José screaming to me along the street: Helena is on the phone; Helena is on the phone... so I left everything and ran to the phone. She used to call every fortnight, but we did not know the exact time or day. If she took longer to call I started to worry about her. (Amalia, 19/01/2014).*

In summary, the capacity and opportunity of the Brazilian migrant women in London as well as their family members in Brazil to talk on the phone in the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s influenced how they established their interaction patterns. The high cost of international telephone calls, migration policies, accommodation,

employment, the difficulties in purchasing a landline, and the need to negotiate in public and private places, all affected how they did family through the telephone calls.

Moreover, the Brazilian migrant women's narratives also pointed to the fact that the telephone calls were mainly 'one way' – from the migrant in London to her family members in Brazil. As stated by Carla: *'I was the one who called them. No one called me'* (Carla, 13/06/2013). Hence, I now explore who talked to whom.

### ***Who took part in talking on the telephone***

Baldassar et al. (2007) found in their study of migrants (Italian, Singaporean, Dutch, Afghan and Irish) in Australia that the telephone calls were usually considered the migrant's responsibility alone. In their study, call costs were a major factor in the decision about who did the calling and who was called, with migrants commenting on the competitive deals they were able to get from particular telephone companies in Australia. However, they also showed that the call costs were not the only factor in the decision. For some migrants it was down to a simple matter of practicality; as the migrants tended to be busier than their parents, because of work schedules, it meant that the parents were more often available to receive telephone calls. In other cases, they found that the migrants felt it was their responsibility to call because they were the ones who had left, thereby creating the need for telephone calls in order to keep in touch.

The Brazilian migrant women studied here also said that the telephone calls were predominantly made by them, mainly to their parents in Brazil. But, different to Baldassar et al.'s (2007) outcomes, the Brazilian migrant women indicated two other reasons for this one-way direction of the calls. The first reason was related to the fact that the Brazilian migrant women in London did not have a private number (landline or mobile phone) until the mid-2000s. Regarding landlines, this migrant group reported that besides it being very expensive, they had moved houses several times, due to their very unstable lives, in terms of working, flatmate discussions, or the ending of relationships.

Patricia (41 years old, in the UK since 1995) stated: *'I have never had a landline. I jumped from international phone cards in phone shops to international cards on the mobile phone. I moved so many times, there was no point in having a landline'* (Patricia, 06/06/2013). Another participant noted: *'I just had a landline when*

*I could have the Internet, because the company gave it to us, before that it was too expensive to have a landline only (Zilda, 23/07/2013). Patricia likewise noted:*

*When I purchased my first mobile phone in the mid-2000s, it was only for emergencies, it was too expensive; so they could call me, but I preferred to call them using international cards, because it was cheaper, and they did not have as cheap international cards as they were here. (Patricia, 06/06/2013).*

The second reason they mentioned for the one-way direction of telephone calls was to do with their parents' dependence on their neighbours' help due to the high cost of purchasing a landline in Brazil. Zilda's sister, Amanda, explained:

*At the beginning it was difficult, we had to wait for her to call us. I could not go to our neighbour's house and say "Hi I've come to call my sister abroad". I could only do it if there was an emergency. And then we saved some money and bought a landline. It was very expensive, but it was fantastic because she could call us at our house. But we could not call her because she did not have a landline. We had the number of the place where she worked, in case of an emergency. (Amanda, 06/12/2014).*

Furthermore, regarding the question of who called and who was called, the practice of talking on the phone among the family members was not age- or gender-neutral. As with the letters, the Brazilian migrant women said that they usually talked on the phone primarily with their mothers, and then with their sisters, but much less with their fathers and brothers. Sometimes the children, i.e. the son and/or nieces and nephews, were put on the telephone to say 'Hello'.

Zilda explained that her mother used to act as a 'hub of communication' (to use a Baldassar et al. 2007 term) for the entire family. She said it was through her mother that she knew what was going on with all the family members in Brazil. She explained: *'my mother wanted to tell me all the details, I think she believed that by doing this I would not be left out and I would continue to be a part of it all'* (Zilda, 23/07/2013). In addition, they said that it was their mothers and/or sisters who were usually responsible for informing the rest of their family (cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents) about their life in London. Helena also said that her mother was the main person she talked to on the phone, she explained:

*My mother was always my Esso Reporter<sup>26</sup> (laughs). Yes, she was and still is the one who has always told me about my father, my brothers, my cousins, aunts, uncles, etc. and she is also the one who tells them about me and what I am doing - work, study, everything. (Helena, 08/05/2013).*

Even though their mothers were their main ‘hub of communication’, their sisters were also mentioned as talking on the phone. *‘When she calls I have to talk, we are four sisters and one brother we ‘the sisters’ fight to talk (Amanda, Zilda’s sister, 06/12/2014).* As happened with the letters, it was the mothers and sisters who were most mentioned in terms of talking on the telephone. Although some family members were more proactive than others, it is important to highlight that talking on the telephone was immensely valued by all the participants I interviewed, including the brothers and fathers. It was also considered by them an important form of ‘doing family’.

In addition, some of the Brazilian migrant women distinguished the practice of the telephone call in the context of family as having some ritualistic features. Besides being a regular occurrence with family members (such regularity establishing a pattern of interaction), and demanding some preparation and negotiation, some of the participants distinguished this practice as being particularly important for them in their constitution of their family life, as it allowed them to have, even if briefly, a sense of a ‘liminal-like’ moment (Turner, 1982:64). This was due to the possibility of hearing the family members’ voices.

### ***Hearing each other’s voice, Yes ... YES I can hear you***

According to Vertovec (2004) the immediacy of the voice is a very powerful experience of connection, which often serves to erase the sense of time and distance. It was a feature of the telephone calls particularly stressed by the Brazilian migrant women in this study. They distinguished this practice for its capacity to give them this sense of simultaneity and feeling of togetherness even if only briefly.

Helena, for example, recalled the difficulty of keeping in contact with her family members in Brazil in the 1990s, but she also stressed how the telephone

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<sup>26</sup> It followed the American version of the programme ‘Your Esso Reporter’. In Brazil, it became very popular and was famous for being the first to find out about very important stories and disclosing them.

conversation was a very meaningful and emotional moment of connection with her family. She explained that her son was a small child, a one-year-old, and he could only make some noises and pronounce a few words, which she said were difficult to understand, but were precious for her: *'I used to like talking on the telephone, more than writing a letter, because I could hear my son. To hear him was a way to make sure he was healthy; he was growing, learning. He was fine'* (Helena, 08/05/2013).

Helena said: *'It was so good to hear their voices, that it was very hard, the moment of hanging up the phone; it was a strange feeling of happiness, because they were fine, but also a feeling of realizing I was not there, the sounds of their voices and stories were kept within me until the next call, which was in the next fifteen days'* (08/05/2013). The strong feeling of excitement during the telephone calls reported by Helena could be understood as giving her the sense of a *'liminal-like'* moment (Turner, 1982:64). She said that she felt *'reconnected'* with her mother and son and the hang-up was her moment of *'disconnection'* and returning to her life in London.

That moment of talking on the phone was described as a very momentary point of her day in which she resolved her *'social drama'* of living at a distance (to borrow Turner, 1957:91's term). In this sense, she said she was able to feel close and together with her family members in Brazil. It was a feeling she wanted to repeat by making another telephone call. Thus, the meaning of repeating the regular telephone calls was for her an expression of her desire to once again have her *'social drama'* of being at a distance momentarily resolved and ephemerally sense a *'liminal-like'* moment of togetherness (Turner, 1982:64).

Thus, the hearing of each other's voices was described as carrying a lot of emotion, importantly producing a sense of being closer, being part of the family, and having the ability to better sense their relatives' health and emotions. The voice could make them somehow more aware of the family member's feeling of tiredness, upset, irony, excitement or happiness.

It was in this context that the Brazilian migrant women constructed the practice of talking on the telephone with their family members in Brazil as a family moment, that was *'special'* for them. Hence, it was worth saving some extra money to spend on the call, and was even worth searching for tactics to overcome the problem of expensive calls and, then, keeping the practice of the telephone call. Indeed, the fact of being able to interact through the *'exchange of voices'* – in listening and speaking – gave them a sense of proximity and of sharing a present moment where the *'[...]*

tone of voice, pauses and silences are more revealing than the words that are spoken or, in the case of a letter, written' (Baldassar et al., 2007:119).

In addition, as happened with the letters, the Brazilian migrant women recalled that from the mid-2000s onwards they reduced the practice of talking on the telephone, not totally stopping as with the letters, but doing it less. However, its importance was not reduced for them in the constitution of their family at a distance. Juliana, for example, noted that they had left oral memory traces about how she had 'done family' with her family members in Brazil.

She said *'I always tell my son how we used to be in touch with people in Brazil. He has difficulty imagining how it was at that time, but it is good for him to know how it was'* (09/12/2013). Therefore, the practice of talking on the telephone in the various ways – in phone booths, phone shops, on landlines, with international phone cards – was distinguished by the Brazilian migrant women in this thesis, as capable of providing proof (not material, but in the stories told) of the importance given to continuing their family connection.

As Morgan (2011b), Cheal (2012) and Gillis (1996) noted, family rituals are not 'out there', but are a constructed set of activities capable of providing meaning which can be remembered and felt again through significant memories. The practices of writing and exchanging letters and talking on the telephone, in isolation have no meaning for the family, but they can be given meaning and distinguishing features to make them capable of becoming meaningful to a particular group, at a specific moment. The Brazilian migrant women recounted how they had done family with their family members in Brazil, making those practices significant in constructing family times at a distance, and their sense of familyhood. As Bell (1997: 107) argues, the participants of this research distinguished these practices and gave them a 'sense of ritual'.

In the next section I explore to what extent the incorporation of new communication technologies, particularly webcam communication by Skype, transformed the Brazilian migrant women's pattern of interactions (Wolin and Bennett, 1984:410) with their families in Brazil.



Table 4.1: Summarizing the main features of writing and exchanging letters and talking on the phone

	Arrangements/Recurrence	Content	Participants gender and age	Capacity/opportunity	Symbolic and affection meanings
<b>Writing and exchanging letters</b>	<p>In the late 1980s, 1990s and mid-2000s</p> <p><b>Arrangements:</b> need for organization and planning</p> <p><b>Frequency:</b> weekly, fortnightly or monthly</p>	<p><b>Brazilian migrant women topics:</b> Writing about their life in London: work experiences, accommodation, friends, relationships and places visited</p> <p><b>Brazilian family members:</b> News about family members: health, relationships and children's development (son, nieces and nephews)</p>	<p><b>Both ways:</b> from the Brazilian migrant women to close family members in Brazil (parents and siblings); from family members, mainly mothers and sisters, to Brazilian migrant women</p>	<p><b>Facilities:</b> Literacy; Low cost</p> <p><b>Difficulties:</b> Time-consuming; Long time to arrive; Delivery of old news</p>	<p>'Control' feelings of <i>saudade</i>;</p> <p>Keeping track of time 'not being left out' of family issues;</p> <p>Materiality of letters: 'totem-like'; proof of family connection; construction of material traces to family memory and history</p>
<b>Talking on the telephone</b>	<p>In the late 1980s, 1990s and mid-2000s</p> <p><b>Arrangements:</b> needs organization and planning</p> <p><b>Frequency:</b> fortnightly or monthly</p> <p><b>Public phone:</b> fortnightly or monthly</p> <p><b>Length</b> 15 to 20 minutes maximum</p> <p><b>International card and landline</b> Weekly and fortnightly</p> <p><b>Length</b> 30 to 40 minutes</p>	<p><b>Brazilian migrant women topics:</b> Talking about their life: work experiences, studying, friends, relationships and places visited</p> <p><b>Brazilian family members:</b> News about family members: health, relationships, and children's development (son, nieces and nephews).</p>	<p><b>One way:</b> from the Brazilian migrant women to close family members in Brazil (parents and siblings)</p>	<p><b>Difficulties:</b> High cost; Public places negotiation (phone booths, phone shops); Private places negotiation (landlady and flatmates); Neighbours' landline;</p>	<p><b>Phone booth in London and neighbours' landline in Brazil</b> Lack of privacy Difficult to express emotions</p> <p><b>Phone shops (international card) and landline</b> Creation of family time in more private places</p> <p><b>Hearing the voices:</b> sense of closeness, ('liminal-like' moment).</p>

Source: Self-elaboration

### 3. Talking on Skype: the entry of new communications technologies<sup>27</sup> into the Brazilian migrant women's transnational family life

*At the time I moved to London, there was no Internet, e-mail or Skype. You know, these things of nowadays. If they were there, they were not available to us (migrants). Nobody used them, nobody had these new technologies at home. (Patricia, 06/06/2013).*

In the UK, throughout the 1990s, new communications technologies via computers became gradually more affordable and accessible (Livingstone, 2004). In Brazil, this process started in the early 2000s, due to the privatization of communication companies (Larangeira, 2004)<sup>28</sup>. In this period, computers and the Internet gradually became available and were incorporated by 'ordinary' people into their lives in both localities. Thus, new technologies slowly stopped being seen only as devices for working or studying, and became important to family interaction as well.

Scholars in media studies have researched how television, computers, and other devices operated in the local places of households (Silverstone et al., 1994; Livingstone, 2004). Scholars such as Madianou and Miller (2012), Madianou (2016), Wilding, (2006), Peñaranda (2011), Baldassar et al. (2007), Baldassar (2016) and Boccagni (2010) have shed particular light on the use of technological devices by transnational families. These scholars argue that it is important to understand how migrants and non-migrant family members used these contemporary technologies of communication; which ones they used and their importance in constituting the transnational family.

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<sup>27</sup> Here the idea of new communication technologies does not follow the traditional distinctions in media studies of technology, medium, platform and applications, which consider the mobile phone and the personal computer as technologies, while e-mail, MSN, Skype, etc. are web platforms or applications within the particular medium of the Internet (Madianou and Miller, 2012). My research follows the participants' understanding and listing of new technologies of communication.

<sup>28</sup> In Brazil the Internet only spread to ordinary people after the process of privatization of telecommunications. During the first government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1994-1998) much of the public sector was privatized, including telecommunications. In 1998, the communications sector was privatized and the monopoly of Telebras and Embratel was ended. The privatization process was very controversial (Lins, 2010). From 2005 onwards, many more people started using the Internet at home rather than in the workplace (IBGE, 2008).

All the Brazilian migrant women in this research recalled that they had used some new communication technologies<sup>29</sup> (such as e-mail, text messages through mobile phones, MSN<sup>30</sup> and Skype<sup>31</sup>) to interact with their families in Brazil from the mid-2000s onwards. Natalia, a 42-year-old living in the UK since 2000, stated:

*I was like that, I was always searching for new things that could make me feel closer, or that could let me talk more, longer, so when I found out about MSN and then Skype, I wanted to know what it was like, and how it worked. I did the download. (Natalia, 15/12/2013).*

The Brazilian migrant women in their narratives stressed that from the mid-2000s onwards webcam communication by Skype had become their main form of interaction with their relatives in Brazil. According to them, the practice of talking on Skype became their main family time which, as with the letters and telephone calls, was described as not happening randomly, but with a constructed ‘pattern of interaction’ (Wolin and Bennett, 1984:410). Moreover, it allowed them to (re)create and share some ‘family rituals of simple family get-togethers’ (Morgan, 2011b:120), which had been constructed culturally and in their families as important moments of ‘doing family’.

In analysing the Brazilian migrant women’s narratives and their diaries I noticed that their interaction patterns with their family members in Brazil via Skype became mostly daily and/or weekly. They noted that before incorporating Skype as their main form of interaction, it was usually, on average, every fortnight, or monthly and the time spent on, for example, talking on telephone was around 30 minutes’ maximum. Besides the occurrence becoming daily and/or weekly with Skype, their interactions with their relatives in Brazil became times which they usually described as ‘dedicated’ to their family. In isolation, the practice of talking on Skype has no significance, but the Brazilian migrant women in this study gave it meaning as their way of ‘doing family’. They related how they constructed talking on Skype as a family time.

### ***Recurrence: daily and weekly***

Claudia, a 55-year-old living in the UK since 1986, said that the practice of

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<sup>29</sup> Facebook was rarely mentioned and WhatsApp was a new app at the time of the fieldwork.

<sup>30</sup> The Microsoft Network Microsoft video communication app

<sup>31</sup> An app that provides video and voice call communication, first released in 2003.

talking on Skype had become, in the last five years, her main family time with her family members in Brazil. She said that with Skype she now talked with her mother on a daily basis at Brazilian dinnertime. Claudia's mother (Luiza) was 86 years old and relied on a carer for help with her daily activities. In her diary, Claudia wrote that every day around 7 p.m., Brazilian time, after she had returned from work, she went online to talk to her mother and check if she had eaten well, if she had taken her medication, how her health was, and if she had been outside in the garden.

She noted that her conversations usually lasted around thirty minutes or more. First, she would talk with her mother. However, Claudia's mother soon became tired as she had a problem hearing and with concentrating on the computer screen. So Claudia would then talk to her mother's carer who usually reported on everything she had done for Claudia's mother, and even on changes in the house, or about a doctor her mother needed to go to, and issues about her own son. Claudia explained:

*Tuesday (28/01/2014) I talked to my mother and her carer today on Skype. I like to talk to her after they have had dinner, or are about to finish, before they go to sleep. Thus, it is always around 7 p.m. Brazilian time. With my mother the conversation is always the same: How are you? Are you ok? Have you eaten well? What have you eaten? How is the weather? Have you been sitting in the garden? Because of her age and health problems she does not talk much. That is why it is good to use Skype, because I can at least see her, but she loses concentration very quickly, so she does not spend much time looking at the camera on the computer. But, I also always talk to her carer as well. (Claudia's diary).*

Fatima also reported talking on Skype to interact with her mother every day at Brazilian dinnertime. In her diary, she wrote that every day around 7 p.m. Brazilian time she talked to her mother on Skype. She wrote that, since 2003 when her mother had a brain aneurism, she had started to communicate daily with her mother, at first using international phone cards, but after her father's death in 2009, she had started to use mainly Skype. According to Fatima, being able to interact with her family in Brazil daily gave her the chance to be more a part of her family's life. She said that her mother arranged to be at home every day around 7 p.m. to talk to her on Skype. Fatima said:

*Thursday 23/01/2014 My mother is old now and getting older. I blame myself for not being there, so I Skype every day and I want to know everything.*

*Recently, I also started to Skype my sister every day, after I've talked to my mother, because she was diagnosed with depression. I am worried about her and my nephews and niece. Thus, I Skype my mother and my sister now every day (Fatima's diary).*

Some participants said that with Skype they created a weekly family time, mainly on Sundays. Lucia said: *'On Sundays, for example, I leave the Skype online the entire day. I know my brother is going to be with my mother and I leave it on, so we can talk at any time'* (27/05/2013). Other participants such as Fatima and Claudia also said that they now interacted daily with their mothers and also on Sundays, when they talk for longer with their mothers, but also with their siblings and sometimes nephews and nieces.

Besides allowing a more frequent and longer family time, talking on Skype was also identified by the Brazilian migrant women of this study, as an important practice for the constitution of their family at a distance, due to its capacity to provide visual clues and instantaneous connections. This new technology had allowed them to share some activities with their family members in Brazil, which they could not do before. These activities had been historically, culturally, socially and even biographically (for each of the families) constructed as family rituals in Brazil.

It is important to note here these were not activities that were naturally 'always there', but they had been constructed as family rituals (Gills, 1996). In the case of Brazil these practices had become 'special' family times, particularly during the country's process of urbanization and industrialization, in which the Brazilian women, as those mainly responsible for the household activities, had created the home as a space separate from 'the street' (DaMatta, 1987:126). In Brazil, many family rituals emerged around food, such as 'dinnertime' or 'Sunday lunch' and also around watching TV, after a long day or week of work (a division privileging the men's working schedule) (Kaloustian, 1994; Samara, 1987; Pinsky and Pedro, 2012).

During my ethnography at the participants' houses, and analysis of their biographical interviews and diaries, I noted that all of them had a computer (usually a laptop). In some cases, they had more than one and they were usually displayed in the living room or the kitchen. I noticed that the physical positioning of the computers in the Brazilian migrant women's houses in London was not chosen

randomly but had meaning in terms of the constitution of the transnational family interactions with their relatives in Brazil.

As they had been in London for a long time when I conducted my fieldwork, most of them were living with their partners and children or by themselves. It is important to note that as they had the house to themselves, they could display their computer in the places they chose, for talking on Skype with their family in Brazil. In the case of the parents and siblings, their interactions with the migrant women also usually took place in their living room or kitchen. The location of the technology while talking on Skype and using its interactive features showed that the participants used Skype to construct family rituals such as having dinner, eating and cooking together in the kitchen, or watching and talking about TV topics together in the living room.

### ***Talking at dinnertime, eating and cooking together in the kitchen***

Scholars have claimed that meals create the home and family (de Vault, 1991); that food and food occasions have a role in unifying the family and creating family identity (Lupton, 1994). In addition, a proper meal can produce in the family a sense of familyhood. Studies on Brazilian migration have also underlined how eating together is an important point of continuity for Brazilian migrant families. Brightwell (2012) in her study about food, identity and belonging among Brazilians in London, notes the importance in family life of eating together, even when all the members cannot be bodily present to share the meal. In my own research, sharing family meals and cooking together through talking on Skype was described as important to (re)produce the sense of familyhood, creating and recreating a sense of companionship and togetherness, and re-signifying the family mealtime as a time that could be experienced together even when living far apart.

Family studies have listed the family dinner as one of the most frequently mentioned family rituals that make up the family's more frequent or regular interactions. While family and household configurations and dynamics have deeply changed in recent years, having a dinnertime together still has meaning for a family's sense of union, social bonding and familyhood (see Morgan, 2011b; Imber-Black and Roberts, 1998; Fiese 2006) even though its form may have been reworked and adapted to the new circumstances of family dynamics, among them the fact of living geographically distant, across different countries. Thus, for the

Brazilian transnational families in this study, dinnertime, eating and cooking together were family rituals that the participants said they could continue on Skype with their family members in Brazil.

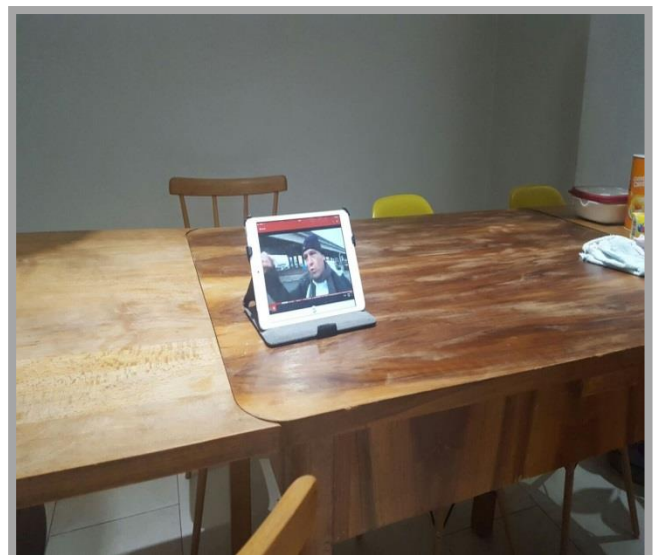
As mentioned above, for Fatima and Claudia, their family time on Skype with their mothers occurred around dinnertime in Brazil, at 7 p.m. In Brazil, it is the time of day when it is expected that all work activities will be finished, so it is a time to dedicate to the family. Thus, even over a distance, dinnertime still had meaning, as stated by Claudia:

*Monday (27/01/2014) Today I talked to my mother and her carer. It was around 21:00 in London, because now we are two hours ahead. I like when it is like that, because I can have my meal when they have theirs. I like to see what they are eating. If my mother's carer is giving my mother fruit, it is good for her bowels. I give my mother's carer instructions about what food to buy, what to cook and how to cook for my mother (Claudia's diary).*

Interaction during mealtimes, particularly dinnertime, was also highlighted by Carla who explained that she put her computer in her kitchen (see pictures) in order to avoid having her meals alone.



Figure 4.2 Carla's kitchen



Carla had a computer in her living room and an iPad in the kitchen. As her interview was conducted in the kitchen, I asked her more specifically about the iPad, which was on the table. She clarified: *'Yes I have the iPad here because I call my siblings and my mother from here. I have Skype on my mobile phone, but I*

*usually call from here*'. Showing the small screen which was sitting on the table next to us, Carla continued: *'I like to call them, especially my sister and my mother, when I am here. You know, my husband works outside London, so I don't like to eat by myself, so I talk to my family in Brazil during my mealtimes, usually at dinnertime'* (13/06/2013). When I asked her how often it happened, she said it was almost daily at the weekdays; at the weekends she didn't share her mealtimes with her family in Brazil, because her husband was in their house in London, and she liked to spend the time with him.

*Yes I talk to them when I am eating, and sometimes, when the time difference is only one hour, they are eating as well, so it is very nice, because we have our meals together. So it is like having lunch and dinner together... I do not do it at the weekend, because my husband is here and then we want to go out, but I do during the week.* (Carla, 13/06/2013).

The importance of companionship during meals, especially of family members, was studied by Lukanuski (1998) who posed the question – why is eating alone so uncomfortable? She argues that eating alone is stigmatized behaviour, because it defies the expectations we have of eating, invoking the Italian proverb 'who eats alone, dies alone', with no 'loved-ones' (Lukanuski, 1998:112). This author, then, states that eating not only fulfils our physical hunger, but also our human hunger – the need for love, security and comfort. I would guess that this Italian proverb was probably repeated in Brazil by the Italian migrants who migrated to this country at the beginning of the twentieth century. I have shown that this migration influenced the ways of 'doing family' (Morgan, 2011b) in Brazil (see Chapter 1). Thus, sharing mealtimes, talking about the food and cooking together are strongly linked in Brazil as important family time, constructed as family rituals, and the participants wanted to engage with them, even at a distance.

In addition to having mealtimes together, Natalia stressed the importance of cooking together. She invited me to her house to carry out the interview, which took place in her kitchen. The computer was on the table and it had the camera turned to the cooker. Natalia explained that she liked to cook with her sister and her mother. She said: *'I usually talk from here (kitchen) when I am cooking and we start exchanging recipes and tips about the cooking'* (15/12/2013). From her diary, it was evident that the practice of cooking together had become a 'special' practice between her and her sister on Skype. During the 30 days that she kept her diary, she



recorded that every evening, usually during the preparation of dinner, she talked to her sister, and one of their main topics was the food preparation, the ingredients and spices Natalia was using, or recipes they wanted to cook.

Cooking has always been a strong part of Brazilian family life, particularly for the women who, even with all the changes in the family configurations and dynamics of the last decades, are still the main ones responsible for the housework, particularly the cooking of meals (Scott, 2012). Natalia explained, for instance, that she usually cooked Brazilian food, or ‘mother food’ that she used to eat at her mother’s house, so she talked with her sister and mother in order to prepare the dish in their family way. But, she recorded, *‘sometimes if I am cooking and my sister sees I am adding something she is not familiar with, she always asks me: what is it? Sometimes, she thinks it is strange, or she asks me: Are you sure it is going to be good?’* She explained that her changes in food habits, sometimes away from what was understood as their family food, her ‘mother’s cooking’, led to a feeling of strangeness, but also learning, as she said that apart from what was being cooked, it was the practice of cooking itself which was meaningful for her and her sister. Natalia affirmed:

*My sister sometimes finds my cooking different, but if she thinks it looks good, she asks for the recipe and she gets upset if she does not find the ingredients in Brazil. We like to cook together (15/12/2013).*

Natalia said that she cooked with her mother and sister via Skype and it had allowed them to (re)construct this ‘family ritual’ of cooking together, which was part of her family’s way of interacting. She noted that cooking together with her sister or mother was a valued part of her day and significant for her in constituting family social bonds at a distance.

Hence, the Brazilian migrant women’s accounts presented above show that the sharing of dinnertimes and cooking together through talking on Skype was an important way of ‘doing family’ with their relatives in Brazil, which involved affective meanings for them, such as being worried about what a loved one was eating, or memories of their mother’s home cooking. They described these as moments that gave them a sense of familyhood. This is not to say that the participants of this research did it all the time. Some of the participants did it more frequently than others, and as I showed, some did it daily. But when they did it,

they considered it as an important way to reinforce their family bonds and express how they valued their family relationships, even living at a distance.

Besides eating and cooking together, some of the Brazilian migrant women said that talking on Skype allowed them to share the Brazilian family ritual of sitting in the living room and watching and chatting about TV topics (Beserra, 2007; Chimelli, 2002). I describe this in the next section.

***In the living room and watching and talking about topics on TV***

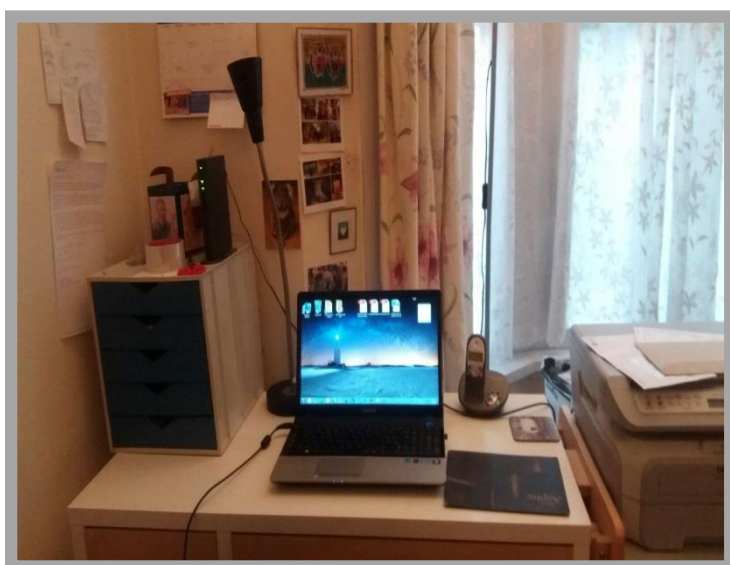


Figure 4.3 Lucia's living room



Figure 4.4 Lucia's mother's living room

Figure 4.3 shows Lucia's living room, while Figure 4.4 shows Lucia's mother's living room (Simone, 80 years old, living in Brazil). In both cases, the computer and the camera are displayed in their living rooms. Lucia had a special table for it, next to the window opposite the television. In her mother's house in Brazil the computer was a laptop on a big dinner table next to the window, and there was a camera high on the furniture which, according to Lucia's brother (Bruno, 53 years old, living in Brazil), allowed his sister to see the whole room<sup>32</sup>. During my visits to Lucia's house in London, she confirmed: '*we talk here*', putting her

<sup>32</sup> Lucia's brother said he had also installed the camera to monitor his mother's carer when he was not at home.

computer on her lap on the sofa. She also said: *'sometimes I take it to the kitchen and we also talk from there, but it is usually here, I sit on the sofa to talk to them'* (27/05/2013). She stated that this practice started when Skype became her main means of communication with her family in Brazil. She explained:

*Skype has changed it all. The instantaneous communication makes it different. E-mail was good and it was faster and more frequent than letters, but nothing is like Skype, because there was no image before. The image makes it different. I am in my living room; they are in my mother's living room. It is like being in the living room together. On Sundays, for example, I like to turn on the Skype, because I know my brother will be at my mother's house. So, I leave the Skype on, then, for example, I show them what I am watching on TV and they do it as well, then we talk about it. It is like being in the room together. (Lucia, 27/05/2013).*

Bruno, Lucia's brother, said that on Sundays he spent the entire day with his mother and he left Skype on all day so that Lucia could come online and they could chat for hours and even watch TV together. Bruno described Sundays thus:

*Every Sunday I come to stay with my mother, I always bring movies, usually old movies that she likes, or we just watch TV. Lucia likes to come online on Sundays, so we both leave the Skype on, even when we are no longer speaking to each other. It is on, so if we decide to tell each other something, we just say it. She comes online a few times to ask about what we are watching. (Bruno, 14/01/2015).*

Morley (1986) argues that watching television in the family context cannot be seen as an isolated act of an individual making a rational choice to watch a certain programme of their choice. In fact, as the author argues, watching television together, even from distant living rooms, serves as a common ground for interaction, and it is constructed as a family moment. He states:

*[...] television is being used for something which is more than entertainment. It is being used as a focus, as a method for engaging in social interaction with others. So, far from simply disrupting family interaction, television is being used purposefully by family members to construct the occasions of their interactions, and to construct the context within which they can interact (Morley, 1986:11).*

In Brazil, due to this country's Catholic influence, Sundays are seen as the main day off and as a 'day of being with family' (Almeida, 1994; Samara, 1994). When television became more popular in Brazil in the 1960s, all the TV channels had a schedule that was different from the other days of the week, dedicated only to family entertainment (Beserra, 2007; Chimelli, 2002). Thus, watching TV

together on a Sunday worked for the participants, as Imber-Black and Roberts (1993:12) state, as an activity which connected them to their past, and to what was a very special time in their family lives.

To summarize, the practice of talking on Skype was described by the Brazilian migrant women as a family time constructed by them at a distance with their family members in Brazil. They identified its features of interactivity and visual cues, as having allowed them to practise some of their family rituals, historically constructed in Brazil as meaningful to family life, such as eating and cooking together and watching and talking about TV programmes on Sundays.

Nevertheless, it is important to show that the practice of talking on Skype, as a family time constructed at a distance, could also face some social constraints affecting the capacity and opportunity to do it, and how it was negotiated among family members.

### ***The capacity and opportunity for talking on Skype***

The Brazilian migrant women in this study recorded that they acquired their first computer in the mid-2000s, and later in the decade they started to use Skype with their family members in Brazil. Some of them recalled that they saved money to buy the computer and that the Internet costs were usually shared among them and their flatmates. For those who were living by themselves or with their partner and children, they noted that the cost of the Internet had gradually diminished since their first use. All of them observed that they did not face any difficulties using the new communication technologies, such as Skype, and they mentioned that it was accessible and affordable for them.

However, some of the migrant women said that their family members' experiences in Brazil with using the new technologies were different from theirs. In addition, during my fieldwork in Brazil, some of the family members, especially the parents admitted difficulty with using Skype.

The Brazilian migrant women recalled talking on Skype with their parents, usually their mothers and siblings. Most of them said that their family time on Skype was usually directed at being with their parents, but their parents in Brazil usually lacked media literacy and depended on their adult-children living locally

nearby, or their carers, to use this technology. This meant that their family time on Skype usually involved their parents and/or siblings or a carer.

As these new communication technologies required some technological knowledge, the adoption of it by their parents, the majority of whom were elderly, on average between 65 and 85 years old, was very problematic. Lucia, for example, reported that her mother was not willing to learn: *'She could have learnt, but she says she is too old for that'*. Thus, she said: *'I talk with her on Skype on Sundays, when my brother is at her house'*. Claudia's brother (Flavio, 65 years old, living in Brazil) recounted how he and his sister started to talk on Skype.

*I went to visit Claudia in London, in 2009, and it was the first time I was going to travel outside of the country [Brazil]. So, my son decided to install Skype to talk to me. It worked very well, and so when I came back, we started to talk using Skype. Thus, at the beginning, every Sunday I used to bring my mother to my house for lunch. There, we turned on the computer and we could talk with Claudia. It was like that for a while, only on Sundays, but later Claudia bought a computer for my mother's house. (Flavio, 11/07/2014).*

Claudia explained that she decided it would be good for her mother to have a computer in her own house so they could communicate, not only on Sundays, but also every day, at dinnertime, as mentioned earlier. Nonetheless, talking on Skype with her mother was not an easy task, as Claudia described:

*My mother is 86 years old and has many health problems. She has had two strokes, and she would not be able to learn the technology. So I had to negotiate it with the son of my mother's carer, because my brother could not go to my mother's house every day to turn on the computer, and the carer did not know how to use it. Now she has learnt (Claudia, 09/07/2013).*

She continued:

*I asked the son of my mother's carer if he wanted a computer. Of course, he said yes, so I offered him a deal. I would give him a computer, if he turned the computer on and went on Skype every night, around dinnertime, so I could talk to my mother. And the computer had to stay in my mother's house. He accepted, and I gave him a computer. (Claudia, 09/07/2013).*

Flavia (a 46-year-old living in the UK since 1996) also recalled that to talk on Skype with her parents she had to negotiate it with her sister. She explained: *'my brother got married and took the computer with him. So now I just talk to my parents using Skype when my sister is there, in their house; before, it was almost every day'* (Flavia, 31/05/2013). But her relationship with her sister was sometimes

conflictive, which affected her interaction with her parents. She said that the construction of her family time with her parents using Skype depended on her relationship with her sister.

*When everything is going fine between me and my sister, I use Skype to talk to my parents, and I even ask my sister to do it for me. But she thinks I am silly because I am here in London and I don't work [silence] we have our differences [silence] so I just talk to my parents on Skype when my relationship with my sister is going well. (Flavia, 31/05/2013).*

Flavia connected her dependence on her sister with her parents' digital media illiteracy and her inability to help them financially by buying a computer for them.

*My mother and father do not know how to use a computer. My father is doing a computer course, and I think if they had a better financial situation, they would have a computer of their own. Unfortunately, now I do not have the money to help them buy it. (Flavia, 31/05/2013).*

Although most of the parents of the Brazilian migrant women had to rely on their sons, daughters, carers or even the carer's relatives to talk on Skype, there were two cases where the parents were independent users. Laura (50 years old, living in the UK since 1985) noted that her father, Alberto, an 81-year-old living in Brazil, had a computer and was totally media literate. She explained: '*we talk on Skype, he likes it because he can see his grandchildren. He deals very well with the technology, much better than I do (laughs)*'. (Laura, 21/07/2013). Ana Clara also noted that her mother had purchased and learnt how to use the new communication technologies, such as Skype. She explained:

*My mother knows how to use it. She even has an iPad. It is very good because as she has cancer and she feels very tired, with the iPad we can talk and she can be in her bed or in her comfortable chair. (Ana Clara, 04/06/2013).*

The above statements, thus, shed light on the capacity and opportunities within the Brazilian transnational families for talking on Skype as family time. The difficulties in using Skype with their parents was connected to their parents' generation, and their unwillingness and difficulties to learn new technologies. The complexity and constant changes in the technologies demand a certain level of digital knowledge and constant updating which meant that they had to be constantly negotiating with local siblings and even carers of their parents.

The same difficulties did not arise regarding their interactions with their siblings. In fact, some of the Brazilian migrant women reported that their family time on Skype with their siblings usually occurred at the same time as the interaction with their parents. Others reported that they had established a special family time on Skype with their siblings, which usually also happened during ‘dinnertime’ or Sundays, as described above.

In summary, the Brazilian migrant women and their parents and siblings created family time with talking on Skype from the mid-2000s onwards. However, the ability and opportunity for the Brazilian migrant women to do this with their parents usually depended on their siblings and/or their parents’ carer. In this sense, talking on Skype involved negotiation with family members (such as local siblings) and/or other people who were important to the family dynamic (e.g. carers).

Although the Brazilian migrant women stressed the importance of talking on Skype with their family members in Brazil, they said that it was not always a ‘happy’ time or without problems and conflict. According to Klein and White (1996:44), family relationships always involve both harmony and conflict; ‘family as a social group cannot exist in total harmony, or they would be completely static’. While talking on Skype could be a way of ‘stepping-into’ family life in Brazil (on Sundays, at dinnertimes, cooking times etc.) and could momentarily resolve the ‘social drama’ (borrowing Turner 1957:91’s term) of living far apart, it could also involve sharing less harmonious moments, of pain, sadness, distress and arguments. In the next section, I discuss the ambiguous feelings connected to ‘doing family’ by talking on Skype.

### ***The ambiguity of feelings about ‘doing family’ on Skype***

Fatima, in her interview and diary, mentioned about having ambiguous feelings towards her interaction with her mother on Skype. She explained:

*I talk on Skype with my mother every day at 7 p.m., Brazilian time. I feel guilty if I do not talk every day. I have to talk, and I do not like even to be late, because I think that my mother is there waiting for my call. I feel guilty if I am late. (03/06/2013).*

She continued:

*To be honest, talking on Skype is good, but it also annoys me, because my mother lost the sense of others after she had the brain aneurism. Most of the time, I am there [on Skype’s camera] and she will start talking to someone*

*else in the room, and then she goes to have a coffee or answer the telephone. And I am on Skype waiting like an idiot. She thinks it is like I am there, sitting on the sofa, and she can do something else. With Skype we can talk more, and show and share things like clothes, food, new nail colours or a haircut. It is good. But, although being on Skype can be good, it is also very annoying (Fatima, 03/06/2013).*

Fatima's account reveals her expectation that talking on Skype with her mother should be a 'special' moment of her day, which her mother should dedicate to interacting only with her. However, her mother's idea of sharing a family time with Fatima was different. She involved Fatima in what she was doing but Fatima felt ambiguous feelings about the family moment of talking on Skype with her mother. At first, she showed a desire to do it, but she had also started to feel obliged to do it. Moreover, she stressed that although it allowed her to have a family time with her mother daily, at dinnertime, and it was important and meaningful for her (she did not even want to be late), once she had 'stepped-in' it was not always as rewarding as she expected.

Sometimes when talking on Skype with her mother, not all, Fatima said she felt disappointed with her mother's behaviour. She blamed Skype for being a form of interaction which 'imprisoned her' on a screen, and she could not share in all the activities with her mother. Although talking on Skype allowed her to constitute a longer daily family time and even share dinnertime together, it was not always a happy time. As Klein and White (1996) note, family times are not always harmonious or lead to 'happy' feelings. Fatima confessed that sometimes she felt too tired to have a daily family time with her mother. She said:

*I go online to talk to my mother, and as talking on Skype is free, there is no excuse not to be online daily. The other day, I wanted a week off from my family issues, and I had to lie that my computer was in repair. I spent fifteen days without going online daily, but when I returned to it, my mother was upset, I was not talking to her daily. But I also like to do it... I do not know when she will no longer be here (Fatima, 03/06/2013).*

Another participant, Claudia, wrote in her diary: *Friday (14/02/2014) 'I am very tired today, I want to talk but I am very tired, but I always make an effort to stay awake to talk to my mother'* (Claudia, diary). The ambiguous feelings of desire and obligation are intertwined. I noted this ambiguity was higher among the



Brazilian migrant women who had elderly parents in Brazil who were in need of care.

Some of the Brazilian migrant women who talked on Skype daily with their parents expected their efforts in creating this family time from a distance to be recognized by their family. Fatima, for example, emphasized her efforts to talk daily on Skype with her mother at dinnertime as a way of participating in the life of her family members in Brazil. However, she felt that her participation and suggestions were still subject to criticism that she was not locally present in their life.

The construction of family time at a distance, through talking on Skype, did not necessarily allow the Brazilian migrant women the same power in the family life decisions. Thus, the local family relationships still showed a hierarchical status in their transnational family interactions. The argument goes: *'I cannot access the entire complexity of the "reality" they are facing'* (Fatima, 03/06/2013), and *'I talk to all of them... but I also think very carefully, because they can tell me: 'you do not know what is really happening here, so do not come with these miracle ideas'* (Lucia, 27/05/2013).

Nevertheless, these ambiguous feelings did not diminish the importance of talking on Skype with their family in Brazil, and they did not say that they would stop doing it. They still considered it a valuable practice for their transnational families' sense of familyhood at a distance. There is nothing contradictory here, as Gillis (1996:94) argues 'we should expect that at the very moment when people are supposed to act like family, the contradictions built into modern domesticity are most likely to surface'.

To sum up, talking on Skype was used by the participants of this study to create their family time from the mid-2000s onwards. As Wolin and Bennett (1984:410) affirm, this can be seen as 'patterned family interactions' or a 'family get-together ritual' (Morgan, 2011b:120) occurring daily, usually at dinnertime, or weekly on Sundays. The symbolic and affective meanings were described by its capacity to allow them to ritualize some family practices, which had been historically and culturally constructed as 'family rituals', such as cooking and eating together, or watching and talking about TV on Sundays. Thus, the participants gave the practice of talking on Skype an importance beyond just having

more time with family. It also qualified as being significant to the constitution of their family and their sense of familyhood.

**Table 4.2: Summarizing the main features of talking on Skype**

Talking on Skype	Arrangements/ Recurrence	Content	Participants gender and age	Capacity/ Opportunity	Symbolic and affective meanings
	From the mid-2000s onwards  <b>Arrangements:</b> least preparation, organization and planning  <b>Frequency:</b> daily or Sundays	Talking at dinnertime; eating and cooking together; sitting in the living room to talk about TV topics	Among adults and children  Mother, father, sister, brother, carer	<b>Facilities:</b> Low cost, <b>Barriers:</b> Digital illiteracy; Dependence on local sisters, brothers or carers; Older parents' difficulty in concentrating on the computer screen	Interactivity; Sense of closeness and co-presence; Ambiguous feelings: Sense of desire and obligation to do it

Source: Self-elaboration

### Concluding remarks

In this first empirical chapter, I have shown how the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil 'did family' monthly, weekly or daily. They reported doing it through various practices which in isolation might have no meaning, but the Brazilian migrant women gave them ritualistic features. These practices were distinguished as being recurrent, performed with their family members, involving preparation, symbolic and affective meaning and leaving traces of the family constitution of their memories and history.

I show that in the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s, the Brazilian families studied here identified the practices of writing and exchanging letters and talking on the telephone as their main family times, practised monthly or every fortnight. The need for repetition of these practices, at regular intervals, was considered important in order to minimize the 'social drama' (Turner, 1957:91) of living far apart by providing from time to time, a sense of togetherness.

The participants also established that these practices involved some preparation and planning. The letters to family members involved choosing and

buying 'special' paper, thinking about what to write and drafting the letters. In the case of telephone calls, they recalled saving up coins during the week and choosing to go to particular phone booths or phone shops. Such practices allowed them to feel '*liminal-like*' moments (Turner, 1982:64). They noted that the crafting of the letters meant having to interrupt other activities and dedicate time to their family. With the telephone calls, they noted that in those moments they were transformed back into daughters or sisters. It allowed them to get the strength to face their London life once again.

These practices were also described by the Brazilian migrant women as having symbolic and affective meaningful. They were affective as they created the sense that 'everything is fine' and had the potential to 'keep track of family life in Brazil', 'keeping their feelings of *saudade* under control', and putting kisses at the end of letters or telephone calls. Moreover, they were also symbolically important. The materiality of letters gave them a 'totem-like' quality, and even having 'healing power' in one case. Finally, while the participants of the research reported no longer doing those practices, they still had symbolic and affective meanings for the families. They acted as 'proof' (material or through oral retelling of stories) of their family connections and were considered by the families as distinct practices able to cross generations. The ritualization of these practices was important to them in constituting their sense of familyhood.

This chapter also showed that more recently, from the mid-2000s onwards, the Brazilian migrant women in London incorporated new technologies into their interactions with their families in Brazil. They established the practice of talking on Skype as their main family time with their family members in Brazil, doing it daily or weekly. The key feature of talking on Skype, highlighted by the participants of this research, was its potential for visual cues and interactivity. This allowed them to practise some historically, socially and culturally constructed ritualistic family moments with their relatives in Brazil. They were able to talk on Skype with their family members in Brazil during dinnertimes and to cook and eat together, as well as watching and talking about TV on Sundays. These were practices constructed in Brazil and, for their families, as their most frequent family rituals.

The sharing of these ritualized family practices on Skype meant that the practice of talking on Skype had been affective and symbolic meaningful for them. They described it as allowing them to (re)connect with their ‘mother’s cooking recipes’, ‘previous times of being with their family watching TV’ and their ‘family moments of eating together’. Those elements allowed them to think of themselves, despite the distance, as (re)constituting their family. The Brazilian migrant women, then, considered that talking on Skype with their family members was a significant practice because it enabled them to ritualize their family time from a distance. Unlike the previous practices, talking on Skype, by itself, had not yet become significant memories or ‘proof’ of their family connection as it was still their current way of interacting.

In this chapter, then, I was able to demonstrate that for the Brazilian migrant women ritualizing was an essential way of ‘doing family’ with their family members in Brazil. They did this through creating and recreating certain practices as family times from a distance which were repeated monthly, weekly or daily. These also communicated symbolically and affectively their commitment and intention to constitute the family even while living at a distance. Thus the ritualization of the family on ‘small-days’ (to use Costa, 2011: 95 term) is important to those families living far apart for their constitution of a sense of familyhood.

In the next chapter, I discuss how the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil transnationally practised family rituals such as birthdays and Christmas, and the importance of this to the constitution of their sense of familyhood.

## Chapter 5

### Doing annual family rituals

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In this chapter I aim to shed light on two annual family rituals – birthdays and Christmas. Both were distinguished by the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil as family rituals valued as significant for their constitution and reconstitution of a sense of familyhood.

According to Cheal (2008) and Gillis (1996), birthdays and Christmas are not ‘natural’ family rituals which have always been part of family life. They have been constructed as part of the family’s annual calendar in modern societies and, then considered as special family times. Scholars studying family rituals, such as Wolin and Bennett (1984), Imber-Black and Roberts (1998), Fiese et al. (2002) and Costa (2011) have framed birthdays and Christmas as invented family traditions and celebrations. These family rituals have been stylized, and carry some distinct symbols and even expected ways of being performed. They are usually culturally specific to the society and/or group practising them. However, as argued by Bell (1992:120), a ritualization is a creative act of production, and it exists because it is constantly produced and reproduced. Thus, family rituals are constructed and can be reconstructed.

Birthdays and Christmas, then, were mentioned by the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil as being significant family rituals, practised by them at a distance. They reported doing them in various forms constantly inventing and reinventing them throughout the long period of their geographical separation. The participants recorded how they had celebrated birthdays and Christmas at a distance since the beginning of their migration process in the late 1980s.

In this chapter, therefore, I have described and analysed how birthdays and Christmas were marked by the participants of this study. I shed light on the different forms of celebrating them over the years, and argue that the practising of these family rituals was important to the constitution of their sense of familyhood.

### **1. Difficulties in ‘going home’ for birthdays and Christmas**

In Brazil birthdays and Christmas are family rituals with a high expectation that they will be experienced with close and extended family (Del Priori, 2006; Itani, 2003). Although the Brazilian migrant women of this study expressed the desire to go to Brazil for birthdays and Christmas, they and their family members in Brazil recalled how it was extremely difficult to travel to Brazil in the late 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, restricting their ability to go home for them.

First, they said about the difficulties connected to the dynamic of flights, with the high cost of the flight tickets in general, but particularly in December, during Christmas time. In addition, there were few flight companies flying between the UK and Brazil. It was only at the very end of the 1990s and early 2000s that Brazil opened its market to international flight companies and increased the amount of flights (Larangeira, 2004). The Brazilian migrant women mentioned that from the 2000s onwards the price of flight tickets was lower, but they were still expensive at Christmas. Second, the participants noted the length of the journey between Brazil and the UK, and inside Brazil. All the flights were and still are concentrated on two Brazilian cities, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. However, some of the migrants’ families lived in other Brazilian states (such as Santa Catarina, Minas Gerais, Rio Grande do Sul) or in the outskirts of the above states, which meant that besides the long flight of twelve hours between Brazil and the UK, they had to face another long journey inside the country.

In addition to the high cost of the flights and the long journey, the migrant women also said that it was difficult for them to be in Brazil at Christmas time due to the jobs they were doing in the UK. Most of them worked in low-paid jobs as cleaners, waitresses, or sale assistants (see Chapter 3). Along their migration history some had acquired higher-skilled jobs in roles such as researcher, secretary or primary school teacher, but they still faced a lot of instability at work as most of

them were on short-term contracts or self-employed. Thus, the ones who worked as cleaners, nannies, waitresses or sale assistants reported that Christmas time was the time of year that required long shifts, and it was extremely difficult to ask for holiday at this time of year, because of business parties in the restaurants, the arrival of relatives in the houses, and increases in sales. Some reported that it was also the time when they would try to make extra money to help with their expenses. The ones with high-skilled jobs reported attending Christmas parties in Brazil, but not often.

In some cases, it was their migration status, as a tourist or student, in the late 1980s and 1990s, which made it difficult to go to Brazil for birthdays and Christmas, as Zilda reported:

*It took me like four years to go to Brazil, because I was scared to death to go and they [migration agents] might not allow me back. There was that thing of migration agents always deporting people, always had it. I was a student, I had my visa, I had done nothing illegal ... I was allowed to work, but there was this fear of migration. (Zilda, 23/07/2013).*

Her mother, Beatriz, recalled her daughter's migration border fears too.

*The first time she came was on Christmas, but she could not relax completely, she was scared, and she kept saying: 'mom I am afraid they will not let me in again'. (Beatriz, 06/12/2014).*

Therefore, going home to celebrate birthdays and Christmas was desirable, but not an easy matter. For some Brazilian migrant women who moved to the UK in the late 1980s and 1990s, the difficulty over migration status was overcome when they acquired a permanent visa or a British passport. Others who arrived in the early 2000s were still in the process of getting a more permanent migration status.

Besides the barriers previously described, in some cases it was their life stages that imposed difficulties. For example, those who had children in the UK mentioned the short length of the Christmas school holidays as a complication of going to Brazil in December. Migrants such as Flavia (46 years old, in the UK since 1996), Zilda (50 years old, in the UK since 1989) and Laura (50 years old, in the UK since 1985) who had children, reported that since having their children it had become extremely difficult to go to Brazil for birthdays and Christmas because of

the increase in the number of flight tickets they had to buy and, later, because of the UK school calendar, with only two weeks off at Christmas. It was considered too short a time to stay in Brazil due to the high investment in the flight tickets and the long journey. In Zilda's case this meant a fifteenth year of not going home for Christmas. She explained:

*This year we are going to Brazil for Christmas, after 15 years, because since the children started school we have not been able to go... and to travel to Brazil in December is very expensive. (Zilda, 23/07/2013).*

The difficulties listed by the Brazilian migrant women in going home for birthdays and Christmas, however, did not mean that they had not celebrated them during their migration. In fact, they highlighted that they had created and recreated ways of practising them at a distance. In the next sections I show how they did birthdays and Christmas at a distance, and how by engaging with these ritualized practices they constituted and reconstituted their sense of familyhood.

## **2. Happy birthday to you, happy birthday dear...**

Birthdays as family rituals are usually thought of as a timeless 'tradition' which has always been there, compounding memories of family history. However, scholars such as Gillis (1996) and Cheal (2008), for example, in historical studies have shown that before the nineteenth century long life was perceived as a precious gift from God, therefore it was something to be prized, even celebrated. Thus, they claim, at that time, both Catholics and Protestants used to give much more attention to the destination (the last days) rather than to the origin (the first days) of life. Therefore, only the highest elite used to count the years of their life and number their days with regularity, but they used to do it seeking the eternal, and contemplating not the beginning but the ending. The last moments were carefully recalled and recounted, and it was death days rather than birthdays that were annually remembered. Therefore, birth dates were not celebrated as 'special' times. Birthdays were private moments for the individual to review his or her spiritual account, not the family occasions they later became.

Gillis (1996) affirms that birthdays started to be remembered and celebrated when the middle classes, from Victorian times, started to organize birthday parties, particularly for children, and to number the years of every family



member. Cheal (2008) explains that with the emergence of modern and bourgeois society and then the creation of the notion of 'family time' as something 'special' and symbolically meaningful, birthdays became occasions to be remembered and celebrated with the family, as a 'special family time' (Cheal, 2008:21). Therefore, according to these authors, from the twentieth century onwards, birthday celebrations became a family ritual, which were important to allow family members to connect with their past and pass on information to the future about how that family works, contributing to the construction of a family sense of togetherness and of itself.

In Brazil, birthdays as ritualized practices became an important family time mainly from the first half of the twentieth century during the period of industrialization and urbanization of the country, and the mass migration from Europe to Brazil (Del Priori, 2006; Itani, 2003). It was a time when nuclear family relationships gradually became valued and the idea of 'sweet home' started to prevail as a privileged space separated from other spaces of 'the street', and the need to ritualize the family. Birthdays gradually became a family ritual (Scott, 2013; Pinsky, 2013b). It can be noted that, for example, the 'Happy Birthday' song was only translated into Portuguese in 1942, by Bertha Celeste Homem de Mello, and only then became a popular birthday rite (Itani, 2003). Thus, creating family time for birthdays helped to celebrate the family as a 'special' site, in terms of moral and affectionate relationships, as DaMatta (1987) has argued.

For the Brazilian migrant women studied in this research, living geographically separated from their relatives in Brazil by long distances as well as for long periods of time did not prevent them celebrating each other's birthdays. Thus, they related different ways of 'doing' birthdays from a distance. In the late 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s birthdays were mainly celebrated by the writing and exchanging of birthday cards and telephone calls. More recently, from the mid-2000s onwards, with the emergence of new communication technologies, birthdays could be experienced in real time by going online on Skype. In some cases, sporadic visits were also undertaken to celebrate special birthdays, as well as some of the migrant women recalling they made annual visits to celebrate their mother's birthday in the later years.

### *Birthday cards*

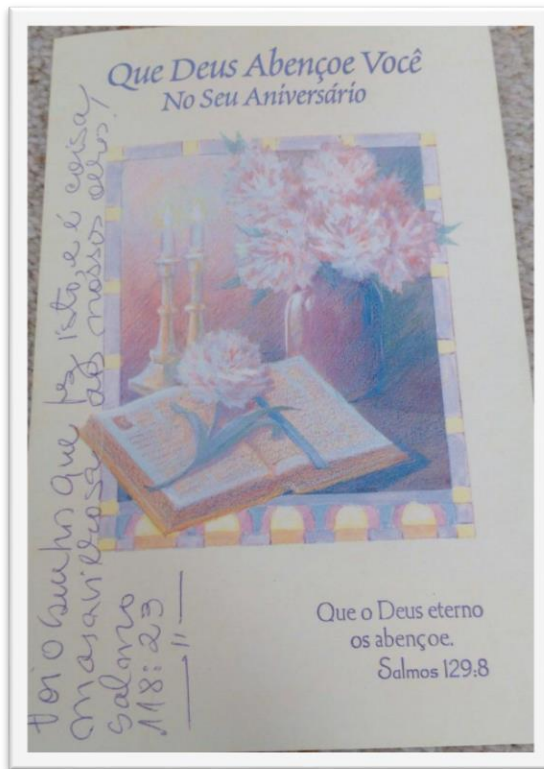


Figure 5.1: Zilda's birthday card from her parents

*'God bless you on your birthday*

*'It was God who made you the most wonderful thing in our eyes' (Salmos 118:29)'*

Zilda, a 50-year-old living in the UK since 1989, and Ana Clara, a 46-year-old living in the UK since 1988, both talked very fondly about writing and exchanging birthday cards as one of their ways of celebrating birthdays with their parents and siblings in Brazil. In order to mark that they were celebrating a birthday from a distance, instead of a letter on paper, as they used to do during their family times on 'small days' (Costa, 2011:95), they recalled carefully shopping for birthday cards. These were different in format, decoration, and the messages and wishes carried. During the interview Ana Clara looked through the window for a few seconds, seemingly looking to her past, and then said:

*I was speaking to a friend the other day, and we were talking about how it was nice when we used to send and receive birthday cards. In that way we could see the detail of the handwriting, we used to kiss the paper, draw hearts (laughs). I also used to like going to card shops. I remember spending hours choosing birthday cards. Here [in London] the cards were nice. They had music and were decorated. They were special. (Ana Clara, 04/06/2013).*

The participants recalled that the sending of birthday cards had to be planned in advance, because it was important that the birthday card should arrive before or on the day of the birthday. Moreover, the birthday cards carried messages of greeting, good wishes, blessings and symbols of care and love designed to celebrate the birthday (see Figure 5.1). They were crafted in detail and included elements to differentiate them as a way to celebrate the birthday. As explained by Angela, a 52-year-old living in the UK since 1988:

*I used to take it home and write it. I used to send a letter with it, in which I used to write things in more detail. In the birthday card, I wrote: Happy Birthday, wishing you health, all the best... kisses... you know, those things. Then the card used to go in one envelope and the letter in another, to differentiate them and both in a bigger envelope so as not to get lost. (Angela, 10/02/2014).*

As well as the distinct messages of ‘happy birthday’ and love (the drawing of hearts and kisses), the birthday cards symbolized materially the importance of celebrating birthdays at a distance I noted that the Brazilian women migrants’ family members recalled that birthday cards sent from the UK to Brazil were usually left on display in the living room of the Brazilian parents’ house for a certain period of time. Beatriz, a 76-year-old living in Brazil (Zilda’s mother), affirmed: *‘I used to leave the birthday cards she sent to us, in our living room, I used to put them there, for a while, like a month or more, then I would remove them and put them in a box’* (Beatriz, 06/12/2014). The displaying of the birthday cards functioned as proof of the family’s connection that even from a distance they had celebrated the birthday as an important family ritual.

The Brazilian migrant women in the UK who, because of constantly moving house (Dias, 2010) and having low-skilled jobs (mainly as cleaners and waitresses) in the late 1980s and 1990s, only got their own private telephone numbers with the arrival of mobile phones in the early or mid-2000s, thus they had high expectations of receiving birthday cards. Their family members in Brazil expected telephone calls more, although they also reported it being important to receive birthday cards.

The birthday cards, for example, meant for the participants of this research that their special date had been remembered and that a lot of kin-work had been put

into it to make it 'special'. It required going out to choose a card in advance for the card to arrive before the birthday, buying it, spending time thinking what to write and writing it, and going to a post office to send the card. In some cases, they recalled receiving a birthday card and a small special gift, such as small chocolates or Brazilian sweets. All these elements were noted by the participants of this study as distinguishing features which characterized their celebration of birthdays among their family members. It created for them a 'sense of ritual' (Bell, 1997:107), making the birthday celebrated at a distance very meaningful for their creation and recreation of a sense of familyhood. The participants who received the birthday cards remembered these moments with extreme tenderness and as 'special' for them to feel they were part of their family life in Brazil, in the late 1980s, 1990s and even early 2000s. Carla, a 38-year-old living in the UK since 2000, recalled: *'the month of my birthday I used to go to my front door every day looking for a colourful envelope, because birthday cards used to come in colourful envelopes. I still have them'*. (Carla, 13/06/2013).

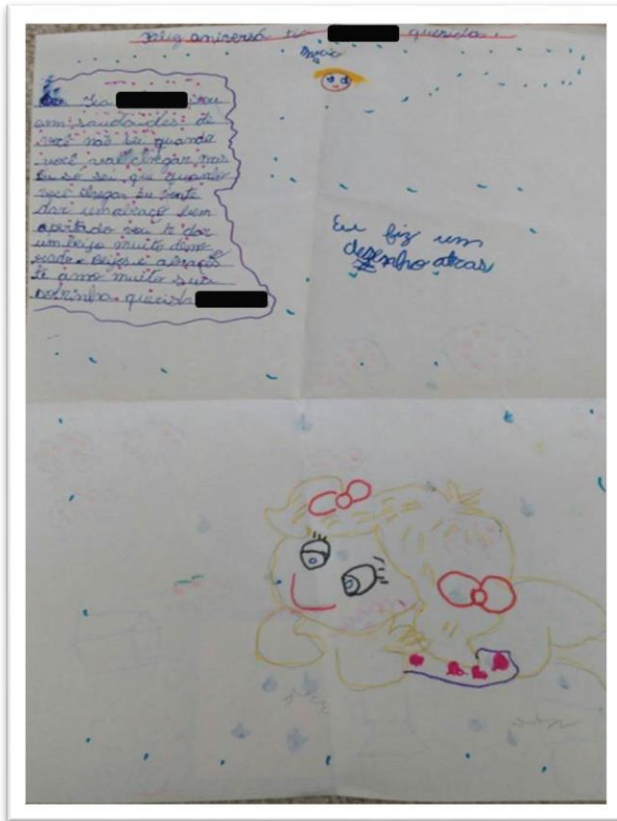
As with letters, birthday cards were noted by the participants of this research as no longer being exchanged among their family members. This meant for the families that, like the letters, their meaning had been transformed into 'proof' of their family connection, having celebrated, in this case, the annual family ritual of birthdays at a distance since the beginning of their migration. Thus, as Fiese et al. (2002) argue, the birthday cards can be seen as 'emotional residue' for the family members, which can be 'replayed' to recapture some of the affective experiences of the family. For the Brazilian migrant women, the act of writing and exchanging birthday cards was important to mark that, although at a distance, they still celebrated their family members' birthdays.

Regarding the writing and exchanging of birthday cards, as happened with the writing and exchanging of letters, in most cases the participants showed a high capacity to engage with it, as all the participants were literate and the cost of posting a birthday card was much lower than making a telephone call, and affordable for the group being researched. In addition, the mothers and the sisters in Brazil, again, were the instigators in the preparation (choosing, buying, thinking what to write) and crafting of the birthday cards and posting them to their daughters or sisters in the UK. Thus, the mothers and sisters were usually the main ones responsible for

the writing and exchanging of birthday cards, except in Zilda's case where her father was the main person who did the birthday cards for her. There were other cases where the writing and exchanging of birthday cards was shared among other family members. Angela for example said:

*My mother used to go to the shop and buy the card, then my sister would be the one who wrote it, she had nice handwriting, and she added everyone's name at the end, but my father used to be the one who posted it at the post office, because he worked in the city centre (Angela, 10/02/2014).*

An important finding was the participation of children, especially the nieces, in the writing and exchanging of birthday cards. Nieces seemed to be more encouraged than the nephews to learn about carrying on the family ritual of celebrating birthdays, as can be seen in the birthday card done by Zilda's niece. Although, it did not have the formal format of a birthday card, Zilda's niece made it as such and she included in it messages to distinguish it as a birthday card. This reveals how the ritualization of the family ties, in this case through the celebration of a birthday as a special family time, was still strongly considered as women's 'work' and the importance of passing it to the next generations of women in the family (Fiese, 2006).



*'Aunt Zilda I miss you. I do not know when you are coming, but I know that when you come I will give you a tight hug and a long kiss. I love you and Happy Birthday! I made this card for you. Your niece'.*

Figure 5.2: Letter from Zilda's niece

In the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s the participants of this study reported that they also used to send photos of birthday celebrations. The Brazilian migrant women recalled sending photos of their birthday celebrations with friends, usually flatmates and work colleagues in the UK, to their families in Brazil. But the Brazilian family members also used to send photos of their birthday celebrations in Brazil to the migrant daughter/sister in the UK. Amanda (Zilda's sister) said: *'I used to send a lot of photos with the letters, when we had a family event. For example, for each birthday of my children I used to take photos and send some to Zilda, so she could see how it was'*. (Amanda, 06/12/2014). Besides the photos exchanged, Laura, a 50-year-old living in the UK since 1985, who had a child in the UK in the late 1980s, recalled receiving voice recordings from her parents singing 'Happy Birthday' to their grandchildren, and recording Brazilian songs on it. She and her children used to do voice recordings singing 'Happy Birthday' and send them to her parents in Brazil. As with Madianou and Miller's (2012) findings on cassettes, in my study the voice recordings were also seen as part of the family's interaction, particularly on family occasions that involved children. However, in this study it

was only reported by Laura, who had children in the late 1980s, as the other participants who did not have children at that time did not use cassettes; the writing and exchanging of birthday cards was their main way of celebrating birthdays at a distance.

As with the letters, the writing and sending of birthday cards usually delivered 'old' greetings and happy birthdays, because even though they were often posted a month in advance, the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil recalled that often they arrived days or weeks after the birthday. Moreover, sometimes the birthday cards went missing and never arrived in Brazil or in the UK. Thus, although writing and exchanging birthday cards was highlighted by the participants of this research as important to them in celebrating birthdays at a distance, and constituting their sense of familyhood, they stressed that they also celebrated birthdays at a distance by making a telephone call. They said that not sending a birthday card was more 'forgiven' than not making a telephone call on the birthday, as discussed in the next section.

### ***Birthday telephone calls***

*'It was a must to make a telephone call on the exact day of their birthdays'*  
(Helena, a 45-year-old living in the UK since 1991, 08/05/2013).

As I have shown, in the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s the participants of this research had to overcome the high costs of international telephone calls and the difficulties of accessing the phones (Larangeira, 2004; Reis, 2010). In the case of the Brazilian migrant women, they depended on public telephones (phone booths and/or phone shops) while their Brazilian families depended on their neighbours' landlines. Thus, it was common to hear statements like: *'Even though it was very expensive, on special dates like my mother's, father's, sister's or brother's birthdays I used to call. It was a must to call.'* (Zilda, 23/07/2013). Another participant, Ana Clara, said:

*I used to call home every month or fortnight, because it was too expensive, but I remember I used to save some money to talk longer when it was the birthday of someone at home. It was my gift (laughs).* (Ana Clara, 04/06/2013).

The families in Brazil would expect the Brazilian migrant women to call on the birthday. The call was usually made in the Brazilian late afternoon, because of the working hours of the Brazilian family members or neighbours (where the

migrant would call if the parents did not have a landline). The birthday call was distinguished from the calls on ‘small-days’ (Costa, 2011:95), which were usually done with mothers and sisters. In this case, the birthday call had to be directed to the birthday person, who was usually the first to engage in the conversation to receive the greetings of ‘happy birthday’, good wishes and blessings, and only then the other family members would talk, one by one. They recalled that a birthday call was usually distinguished from other telephone calls as it involved describing the birthday celebrations, which could be happening if the birthday was on the weekend, or describing the forthcoming celebrations, if the birthday was during the week.

In addition to calling their parents and siblings in Brazil to wish them a ‘happy birthday’, and to find out about the birthday celebrations, the Brazilian migrant women noted that it was also expected of them to make a phone call to Brazil on their own birthday in order for their parents and siblings to wish them a ‘happy birthday’ and to know how they would be celebrating it. This was because they did not have landlines or mobile phones in the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s, so could not be reached via the telephone by their family members in Brazil. Voice communication was extremely valued by the participants to celebrate birthdays, before the introduction of Skype. It allowed them, as they reported, a more complete interaction on ‘special’ family occasions such as birthdays, which gave them more a sense of togetherness. Ana Clara recalled this fact:

*I remember receiving birthday cards from my mom, but I also remember that I called them on my own birthday, because they wanted to talk to me and say Happy Birthday, wish me well, I did not have a landline, and although they knew the telephone number for the place I used to work, they could not speak English, so how could they ask for me... It was too complicated, so the arrangement was: I called them. (Ana Clara, 04/06/2013).*

As revealed in the previous chapter and in other studies on transnational families, the immediacy of the voice was a very powerful experience of connection (Baldassar et al., 2007; Madianou and Miller, 2012; Vertovec, 2004). The power to momentarily erase the sense of time and distance creates a ‘liminal-like’ moment (Turner, 1982:64), as argued by Wolin and Bennett (1984) on family rituals. Thus making telephone calls on birthdays was valued by the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil as an important way to celebrate them as it gave



them a sense of proximity and togetherness. The participants of this study said that, in the case of birthdays, although the writing and exchanging of birthday cards was seen as important, a birthday telephone call also had to be made on the actual birthday.

In summary, the Brazilian migrant women confirmed that even though the writing and exchanging of birthday cards was seen as a legitimate way of celebrating birthdays at a distance, holding symbolic and affective meaning for them as it involved kin-work, thinking and crafting, which marked the event as special, it was not their only way of celebrating them in the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s. Because it was an asynchronous way of celebrating the birthday, I noted that if just a birthday card was sent or received, the family interactions could suffer from some resentment. However, if only a telephone call was made there was a feeling of fulfilment of the family expectation of being as 'close' as possible and sharing this family event. Thus, in the case of birthdays at a distance, a telephone call was the preferred and valued way of showing love and affection to mark the celebration of the birthday. However, even though telephone calls were the more valued expressions of acknowledging birthdays, it is important to note that both ways were meaningful for the constitution of their sense of familyhood. They were both remembered by the participants as significant in the formation of their family history at a distance.

Scholars such as Madianou and Miller (2012) have noted that 'old' technologies do not disappear as 'new' technologies emerge, and that they in fact coexist and are used for different purposes in different situations. However, in the case of the migrant women and their family members in Brazil celebrating birthdays at a distance, the emergence of new communication technologies, such as Skype, which brought the possibility of interacting by talking and seeing each other became the main mode for celebrating birthdays. It introduced a new dynamic to taking part in birthday celebrations. It led to the end of writing and exchanging birthday cards and reduced international telephone calls to being complementary or when the person wanted quick contact, which was not appropriate for birthday occasions. Thus, from the mid-2000s onwards, webcam interaction via Skype became for the Brazilian migrant women and their family members the preferred way to interact on birthdays. As Haddon (2004:117) says 'our longer term relationship to ICTs can

alter, be that in terms of deciding to adopt or give up a technology or to use it more, less or in different ways'. So for these Brazilian families' birthdays could no longer just be remembered and marked by greetings in birthday cards or in a telephone call, but had to be celebrated together online, with 'virtual co-presence' (Wilding, 2006; Hamel, 2009; Madianou and Miller, 2012).

### ***Blowing-out the birthday cake candles together***

The migrant women of this research recalled organizing and taking part in birthday celebrations via Skype with their family members in Brazil. They noted that the incorporation of Skype into their transnational family dynamic allowed them to get involved with helping to organize birthday parties, greeting the birthday person, sharing and performing birthday rites at a distance, and actually taking part in the whole birthday party. Lucia, a 50-year-old living in the UK since 1986, for example, said that she and her sister (Mara, 49 years old, living in Brazil) spent hours on Skype planning the eightieth party of their mother (Simone, 80 years old, living in Brazil). Lucia explained:

*My mother will be eighty this year so we are going to do a big party. My mother's family love parties. So we have rented a room, a buffet in a nice area of the city where she lives. My sister and I, we have decided what's the best food to have in the buffet. The decorations, we have also talked about, and of course the music, it has to have music. My mother plays guitar and loves singing. The entire family loves singing and reciting poems. So we are organizing everything together through Skype and searching on Internet websites. (Lucia, 27/05/2013).*

Other Brazilian migrant women participants of this research also highlighted how they had done birthdays on Skype where they joined in with important birthday rites which marked that they were celebrating this special family time such as singing the Happy Birthday song, having a cake and blowing out the birthday cake candles together. According to Gillis (1996), Cheal (2008) and Imber-Black and Roberts (1998) some of the symbols of birthday parties such as blowing out candles on a cake have been constructed to symbolize our progression through the years. The authors explain the constructed rites of birthday celebrations:

*Candles contain light and so can symbolize birth and at the same time, they burn down and go out, symbolizing death. By adding one each year, candles symbolize our progress through the life cycle toward death, and when we make a secret wish over them and blow them out, it is a small way to assert*

control over the inevitable... Most people sing 'Happy Birthday' with the candles lit, and the birthday person is supposed to blow them out with one breath. Often the number of candles represents the number of years the person has been on this earth. This kind of repeated symbolic action across birthday years and across families is familiar and known and helps us to move into the unknown of the future year. It also marks the change in age status of the birthday person (Imber-Black and Roberts, 1998:172).

Patricia, a 41-year-old living in the UK since 1995, shared how since she incorporated Skype into her interactions with her family in Brazil in 2008, for each birthday of her mother (Antonia, 65 years old living in Brazil), her brother (Celso, 42 years old living in Brazil) and her niece (Clara, 5 years old living in Brazil), she has turned on Skype to greet her family members and they sing 'happy birthday' together. She added that since her niece was born, every birthday she buys a muffin or cupcake and a small candle, to say 'happy birthday' to her niece. As suggested by Imber-Black and Roberts (1998), a birthday cake is such a firm and widespread recognized symbol of birthdays that as long as other elements that signify the birthday are present (such as a candle on top and the 'happy birthday' song being sung together), it is no longer important whether the cake is only a small muffin or a big cake; what makes it important is the meaning people give to it in order to differentiate the birthday as a special moment for them. As Patricia described:

*I have a five-year-old niece. My brother has done big parties, where he invites the entire family, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, but I could never go, every year something has happened that did not allow me to go. One year I was in the process of getting a permanent visa, another year I was changing my job, the next one there was another thing... So, since her first birthday, I have always bought a muffin and a candle, and I leave everything prepared before we go online. I leave it next to the computer, so as soon as they all come onto Skype [her mother and her brother, who live in different cities in Brazil], I light the candle on the top of the muffin and we sing 'Happy Birthday' together for my niece. It is nice. Last time, it was really nice, because now she interacts more, so I bought a decorated cupcake, a pink one with a Peppa Pig face on it (laughs). She loved it. Then, we sang 'Happy Birthday' and I told her to make a wish and blow out the candle, and she did it. I blew out the candle of course (laughs). It was nice! (Patricia, 06/06/2013).*

Carla said: *'I engage 100% in my niece's birthdays from here'* (13/06/2013). She recalled staying online on Skype during the entire 1-year birthday party of her niece in Brazil. Missing not being present at the party in Brazil, Carla explained:

*I wish I had been in Brazil for my niece's birthdays, especially her first birthday. My sister prepared a party for her. I wanted to be there helping and celebrating together. But I saw it on Skype. [...] Yes... yes ... I asked my sister to leave Skype on, so I could see the party and interact with the people there. I saw the entire party. Now my sister wants to do a party of a Disney character, I told her that I will buy the dress here, because it is cheaper here. And I've already told her to set up a place for the computer because I want to be at the party. (Carla, 13/06/2013).*

Similarly, Zilda (50 years old, living in the UK since 1989) and her sister Amanda have experienced a birthday on Skype. Amanda recalled that Zilda asked to be able to take part in her niece's birthday party: '*She said to me: Amanda I want to take part in this party, please go online*' (Amanda, 06/12/2012). She had then turned on Skype and showed all the details of the party to her sister (Zilda). She explained:

*First, I took her around the party. I showed her the cake table and the decorations and I let her talk to some of the guests. They were our cousins, aunts, uncles, and friends. She knew everybody. Then she asked me to take the computer to the bedroom, where the gifts were on display on the bed. So, I took her. Then, I showed her the gifts one by one. After that, I got tired of being her only host, so I let her go around, and I went to eat (laughs). (Amanda, 06/12/2014)*

She continued:

*She talked to everyone at the party and then she called me: Amanda... Amanda... I told her: 'I am eating'. So I showed her what I was eating. She said: Oh! I really want to eat 'brigadeiro'<sup>33</sup>. Oh, next time I come to Brazil, I want to eat it. So I said I would cook it for her. (Amanda, 06/12/2014).*

Thus, the above accounts reveal that going online on Skype during birthdays has allowed the Brazilian transnational families to share culturally and historically constructed birthday rites. On Skype the distinguishing features of birthday celebrations go beyond the crafting, greetings and messages of birthday cards and telephone calls, the participants can actually take part in the singing of 'happy birthday', candles being blown out, sharing the symbolic significance of the cake and culturally identified Brazilian birthday sweets (such as *brigadeiro*), seeing gifts on the bed, and talking to the guests. In addition, as observed by Costa (2011) in

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<sup>33</sup> '*Brigadeiro*' is a Brazilian sweet made of chocolate, a typical sweet for children's birthday parties.

her study of ‘family rituals’ among Portuguese families in Portugal, children’s birthdays were treated as special to the family’s constitution, reinforcing the family ties. The Brazilian transnational families of this study also emphasized the particularity of taking part in the children’s birthdays, as the above accounts show. Wanting to mark the importance for them of their niece’s birthday, some of the participants performed birthday rites via Skype such as the singing of ‘happy birthday’, buying a birthday cake, lighting a candle, and asking their nieces to make a wish.

In fact, going online on Skype to take part in a birthday at a distance allowed the participants of this research more visual cues, and the simultaneity and interactivity to incorporate the symbols which mark birthdays for them, and experience the birthday (singing ‘happy birthday’, lighting a candle, making a wish). These elements, as argued by Baxter and Braithwaite (2006), make birthdays aesthetic moments and distinguish them as family rituals, ‘special’ family times that are essential for the family’s sense of continuity.

Although in the earlier years’ birthday cards and telephone calls were, for the Brazilian transnational families, ways to celebrate family birthdays, celebrating birthdays on Skype became the newest way to do it. Some of the participants viewed celebrating birthdays on Skype as having a higher ‘degree of ritualization’ (Bell, 1997:206), as it allowed them to feel they were sharing more elements that distinguished this practice. By ritualizing their family ties on Skype during birthdays, the participants were able to create and recreate this important family time. They described it as vital for them to affirm even more their sense of familyhood.

However, I would like to highlight that not all the participants took part in all the birthday rites on Skype, and that they usually celebrated the birthdays mainly of their parents, siblings and their siblings’ children. But they stressed that there were high expectations to participate, among these family members, even if only greetings were shared to distinguish it as a ‘special day’. If it was forgotten and/or not practised, there would be feelings of resentment towards those family members. Claudia wrote in her diary:

*Friday (07/02/2014) - I skyped with my mother and her carer. It is my birthday today, I thought her carer would remember it, but she did not say anything.*

*My mother does not remember dates anymore, unfortunately. The carer should have reminded her. I remember everyone's birthday.*

*Saturday (08/02/2014) - My brother came online today because it was my birthday yesterday, he does not usually go online on Saturdays. He was alone in his house, so it was only him greeting me. My sister-in-law was out and even the following day she has not made any effort to greet me. And nowadays it is so easy, it is free with Skype. (Claudia's diary).*

The ability to be easily reached, and the facility of the new communication technologies, such as Skype, have made any excuses for forgetting a birthday among family members even less forgivable and more painful to those who are forgotten. When a birthday is forgotten, it can create a feeling of being left out or disregarded. In Claudia's case such feelings were mixed with guilt due to her long absence, which is a feeling that frequently appears in the various arrangements of other studied transnational families (Baldassar et al., 2014). She wrote:

*Saturday (08/02/2014) - I know I left a long time ago, and that they carry on with their lives. But I remember their birthdays, I call everyone, I buy them gifts... but they do not, only my brother remembers, and talks to me. (Claudia's diary).*

Claudia's account does not mean she has stopped celebrating birthdays or considers it less important to her sense of familyhood. Birthday family rituals do not necessarily have to be satisfactory experiences all the time, as families are also constituted by moments of conflict (Cheal, 2008; Gillis, 1996; Baxter and Braithwaite, 2006; and Imber-Black and Roberts, 1998). This does not diminish the importance of celebrating birthdays at a distance, as important family times, as Claudia's account revealed. It was important for her that her birthday was remembered and celebrated, but even if it was not, she would continue to do it for family members, as a way to feel part of her family life in Brazil.

Besides family birthdays being celebrated at a distance, with 'old' and 'new' communication technologies, the transnational families in this study mentioned that in more recent years, due to advances in fast travel, more affordable flight tickets and their mothers' old age, they had taken part in some birthdays in Brazil in person. In this regard, some participants reported incorporating into their annual calendar a visit to Brazil for their mother's birthday, as is described in the next section.

### ***Going to Brazil for my mother's birthday***

I noted that the Brazilian women migrants would try to celebrate their mother's birthday in Brazil with their parents. As Lucia noted:

*When I first arrived here, I could not go to Brazil very often, it was expensive. I did not have enough money to go like every year. I was in my twenties and my mother was in her fifties, she was full of energy... but now it is different, she is in her eighties and she is very fragile and she will not be here forever... so in the last five or six years I have made the effort to go to Brazil every year on her birthday. She likes birthday parties... I always go for my mother's birthday in June. My mother will be 80 this June and we are organizing a big party for her. (Lucia, 27/05/2013).*

Claudia, whose mother was 85 years old and lived in Brazil, reported that since her mother's two strokes in 2005, she had travelled every year to Brazil for her mother's birthday in December. She described how she organized her visit to Brazil on her mother's birthday.

*Nowadays, I always go to Brazil on my mother's birthday in December. So at the place where I work I have to request my holidays in advance, and I also have to save some money and buy the flight tickets in advance, because, you know, in December it is always more expensive. Her birthday is on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December, so I like to arrive by the 12<sup>th</sup> so I have time to prepare something, like a cake for her, so my brother and sister-in-law and a nephew usually go as well. It is nice, we sing Happy Birthday, these things. (Claudia, 09/07/2013).*

The Brazilian migrant women who reported going to Brazil for their mother's birthday, predominantly confirmed that their mothers were elderly with their health having deteriorated in recent years. Thus, the perception of the finitude of their parents, as noted by Fatima, a 43-year-old living in the UK since 1996: *'I now go to Brazil every year for my mother's birthday, my father has already died, and she won't be with us that long'* (03/06/2013), has led the Brazilian migrant daughters whose parents are old and fragile, to more fully engage with visiting parents and being physically present in Brazil, for their mothers' birthdays.

Similar to Claudia, Fatima reported negotiating her visits to Brazil to attend her mother's birthday. Fatima said that since her mother had a brain aneurism, in 2003, she has tried to go to Brazil for her mother's birthday.

*I always go to Brazil in July and come back at the end of September. Sometimes I go back in December, not always. So, you can see that I spend all my money on going to Brazil. At times, I have wanted to have a permanent job position here, but it would not allow me to have this flexibility. I know it is my choice ... I feel I have to do my part of my mother's life... A few months ago my brother got tired of my mother and then she went to spend some time with my sister, now she has returned to live next to him. I wish she could come to stay here for a while, but there is no space where I live. Everything would be complicated, like the migration policies, she would feel lonely, and she does not speak English. So, I prefer to go there. I believe I have to do it. (Fatima, 03/06/2013).*

On the reasons for her visiting Brazil on her mother's birthday, Fatima continued:

*My brother has always been more distant, even though my mother lives next door to him. You know, there is this thing of being a man and he has a very important position in his career, so he travels a lot. So he does not have time to prepare a birthday party for my mother, for example, that I think is important particularly now that she is getting old. But, it is fine, I think the fact of going every year for her birthday and preparing a birthday party for her, staying there to care for her is my personal decision. I feel I have to do it. If my sister was a bit more responsible I might feel less responsible for going to spend long periods there. But my sister cannot take care of herself. I am the oldest sibling. I feel responsible to do my part. (Fatima, 03/06/2013).*

Claudia and Fatima's accounts shed light on two significant variables regarding visiting Brazil to celebrate their mother's birthday. The birthday celebration works as a special family occasion, which becomes their responsibility. Besides her gender, Fatima's account reveals that being the oldest sibling also made her feel more responsible for providing her mother with a birthday celebration as well as some 'hands-on' care. Being the oldest and a woman put extra pressure on her to be involved in the family ritual of her mother's birthday, but it was not solely an obligation. In fact, she highlighted that doing this, being in Brazil on her mother's birthday and being responsible for the birthday celebration helped her to feel that despite living geographically far apart for many years, she still had a role to play in her family's life in Brazil. It reinforced her sense of familyhood.

To summarize, I have shown here that celebrating birthdays was valued by the Brazilian transnational families as a family time, which they did at a distance. This was a special time which was vital for them in constituting and reconstituting their sense of familyhood, even though geographically separated for a long period of time. The Brazilian migrant women in the UK and their families in Brazil



described celebrating birthdays in various ways. As shown, in the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s, the writing and exchanging of birthday cards and making telephone calls with the distinguishing features of ‘happy birthday’ messages, greetings, and best wishes were their main ritualized acts which aimed to mark that they were celebrating the birthdays at a distance.

However, from the mid-2000s onwards, with the incorporation of Skype into their transnational family lives, their way of celebrating birthdays has been transformed. It became possible to organize birthday parties together from a distance, and culturally and historically constructed ‘birthday rites’ were (re)incorporated into their family life, such as the singing of ‘happy birthday’, the cake, the blowing out of the candles, talking to the guests, and looking at the gifts. These were some of the constructed symbols of the birthday parties that could be shared from a distance. Moreover, in some cases, when the participants’ parents were getting on in years, annual visits were arranged in order to celebrate their birthdays with them in Brazil. Celebrating birthdays, even from a distance, was recalled as a ‘special’ family time and was valued by the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil. They listed the different ways they had done it, over their long migration period. Thus, celebrating birthdays at a distance (or by visiting) was essential for them to (re)constitute their sense of familyhood.

**Table 5.1: Summarizing the main forms and features of birthday celebrations**

Writing and exchange of birthday cards	Features/ Arrangements	Content	Participants Gender and age	Capacity/ opportunity	Symbolic and affective meaning
	<p><b>In the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s</b></p> <p>Need for planning and organization a long time in advance</p>	<p><b>Greetings:</b> Happy birthday, good wishes, blessings and symbols of love (drawing of hearts and kisses)</p>	<p><b>Both ways:</b> from the Brazilian migrant women to close family members in Brazil (parents, siblings and nieces and nephews); from family members, mainly mothers, sisters and nieces</p>	<p><b>Facilities:</b> Literacy Low cost</p> <p><b>Barriers:</b> Time-consuming shopping and writing; Long time to arrive</p>	<p>Emotional ‘work’ (choosing, buying, thinking what to write, writing and posting)</p> <p>Materiality of birthday cards: proof of family connection; construction of material traces to family memory and history of participation in family annual calendar</p>
<b>Making telephone calls</b>	<b>In the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s</b>	<b>Greetings:</b> Happy birthday,	<b>One way:</b> from the Brazilian migrant women to	<b>Difficulties:</b> High cost;	Feeling of ‘rightness’ and togetherness;

	Need for planning and organization in advance	blessings and good wishes	close family members in Brazil (parents and siblings)	Public places negotiation (phone booths, phone shops); Private places negotiation (landlady and flatmates); Neighbours' landline	Hearing the voices: sense of closeness, ( <i>'liminal-like'</i> moment)  Feeling of resentment and lack of consideration (when not practised)  Oral proof of family interaction for birthdays
<b>Going online on Skype</b>	From the mid-2000s onwards  Need for planning and coordination	<b>Greetings and birthday rites:</b> Singing of Happy Birthday; Blowing out the candles on the cake; Talking to guests; Watching the gift-giving; Checking the traditional food	<b>Both ways:</b> from the Brazilian migrant women to close family members in Brazil (parents and siblings) and particular attention to children (nieces); - and from family members in Brazil to the Brazilian migrants	<b>Facilities:</b> Low cost, <b>Barriers:</b> Digital illiteracy; Dependence on local sisters, brothers or carers; Older parents' difficulty in concentrating on the computer screen	Sense of co-presence Sense of togetherness  Sense of rightness  Feeling of resentment and neglect (when not practised)
<b>Visiting</b>	Need for planning and organization in advance	<b>Sharing the celebration:</b> Singing of Happy Birthday; Blowing out the candles on the cake; extended family guests; gift-giving; traditional food and music	<b>One way:</b> Brazilian migrant women to elderly mothers, include siblings, nephews and nieces	<b>Facilities/Barriers</b> High price of flight tickets Long journey Work negotiations Migration status	Reinforce family ties face to face to continue the migration

Source: Self-elaboration

In addition to birthdays, Christmas was also mentioned by the Brazilian women and their family members in Brazil as a 'special' family time which they celebrated at a distance to constitute and reconstitute their sense of familyhood. I turn now to describe and analyse how the participants of this research did these Christmas celebrations.

### 3. Merry Christmas!! Christmas is 'family'

Like birthdays, the celebration of Christmas has not always been considered as a family ritual. It has become part of the process of ritualization of family ties in modern societies (Cheal, 1988b; 2008). Gillis (1996) reveals that Christmas as we

know it today was invented by middle class families, and not by the Church. The author argues that it was only in the 1850s that Christmas became a very private affair. The emergence of the bourgeoisie made Christmas an event of the nuclear family and close kin. Therefore, currently the greatest characteristic of Christmas day is the general idea of regarding it as a domestic and family ritual. Gillis (1996) states that the modern Christmas is a time not only for returning home, but for looking back to family history, reconstructing the past and it is an important moment for family members to perceive themselves as a family. He explains about the modern Christmas:

The ritualized nature of the day, with its emphasis on doing things just as they always have been done, gives it the unique feel of being time out of time, the opposite of linear time in the sense that it is recoverable time. Christmases past are always symbolized as bigger and better regardless of all evidence to the contrary. Nostalgia was present from the very beginning [...] the value of Christmas was that it gives us access to our past and thus to our true selves, individually and collectively. Its rituals are performed with a deliberate attempt to throw ourselves back into the past, or to reenter for a moment the mental childhood. Christmas established a successful precedent for the creation of a new kind of family time (Gillis, 1996:103).

The distinguishing features of Christmas such as: the sense of recoverable time, nostalgia, connection with childhood, and widely constructed Christmas symbols were highlighted by the participants of this research, who also noted particular distinct features of their own families' ways of doing Christmas, which marked for them that they were celebrating this special event. In Brazil, Christmas as a family ritual, rather than solely a religious event which had to be celebrated by going to the Catholic Church<sup>34</sup>, started in the first half of the twentieth century (Del Priori, 1994; Itani, 2003; Scott, 2013; Pinsky, 2013b). Similar to birthdays, Christmas in Brazil came to be valued as a family ritual mainly during the process of urbanization, industrialization and the mass immigration of Europeans, which made the nuclear family the privileged form of family in Brazil. Around that time, Christmas gradually became a time which belonged to the family's annual calendar, and to be with family members was the way to celebrate Christmas. But as I showed at the beginning of this chapter, 'going to Brazil' for Christmas was very difficult for the Brazilian migrant women. However, they still emphasized how they had

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<sup>34</sup> The dominant religion in Brazil historically was and still is Christianity, specifically Catholicism, traditional protestantism and, more recently, Pentecostal (Sheringham, 2011).

celebrated Christmas with their family members in Brazil since they moved to the UK.

Christmas, as an important family time in their annual calendar, was considered so significant to their family constitution and sense of familyhood that they found ways to continue the tradition from a distance. The participants noted how they practised Christmas, as not being together did not mean a year without a family Christmas.

### *Christmas cards*



Figure 5.3 Patricia's Christmas card to her parents



Figure 5.4 Patricia's Christmas card from her parents

As with family birthdays, in the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s the participants of this research reported that they celebrated Christmas mainly by writing, sending and receiving cards and making telephone calls on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day itself (24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> December). Patricia recollected that to take part in the Christmas with her family in Brazil she used to shop and send Christmas cards a month or more in advance, because in December the post offices were extremely busy, and the delivery of letters used to take even longer than the normal time. She explained:

*At that time, to make a letter reach Brazil before Christmas day, I had to post it in November. It used to take ages to get there on time. So, I remember shopping for Christmas cards at the very beginning of November. (Patricia, 06/06/2013).*

She explained that the post office service between the UK and Brazil was not reliable:

*You know, the post office was too slow. Once they made a mess with my Christmas cards. I posted several Christmas cards all together, but they were all delivered at different times, one to my brother arrived during the carnival (laughs). From that moment onwards, I decided to send all the Christmas cards to my mother's house in one big envelope and she used to distribute them to everyone on Christmas day. That way, everyone was sure I had not forgotten one or another. They were all together. (Patricia, 06/06/2013).*

Patricia's account highlights the importance of avoiding misunderstanding and feelings of being forgotten, as it could lead to family resentment and conflict (Imber-Black and Roberts, 1998). Talking about the sending of Christmas cards and who could or could not be forgotten, Patricia revealed who she sent cards to. The 'everyone' she referred to included her mother, father, siblings and close extended family members such as cousins, aunts, uncles and grandmother. She stated:

*I used to send cards to my mother and father, that was one; then to my brother and my sister-in-law, another one; then to my close cousin, her husband and two children, another one, and finally to two aunts and uncles who used to go to my mother's house for the Christmas evening, and to my grandmother, who was alive at the time. But she was old and we no longer had Christmas at her house like it was when I was a child. When I moved here, Christmas was already then held at my mother's house. (Patricia, 06/06/2013).*

Patricia recalled vivid memories of the Christmas celebrations at her grandmother's house in Brazil, which had deep emotional meaning for her. She remembered the tree preparation in the middle of December, when she and her mother used to go to her grandmother's house to help with the decoration of the Christmas tree. She explained how they used to glue white cotton-wool onto the trunk of a natural tree to pretend it was snow, and how they were involved with the nativity scene, when she and her mother, months before, would plant rice in small tins to be part of the decoration. She also recalled the Christmas nights that she, her mother, father and brother spent together with their grandparents and aunts, uncles and cousins. Thus, she explained that in her first years in the UK she felt extremely lonely and depressed at this time of the year. But one thing that helped her to heal

the pain of being at a distance was that she could show her family back in Brazil how Christmas was in the ‘cold’ part of the world as they used to see on TV programmes or films. She said she bought ‘*very typical Christmas cards*’ (see Figure 5.3) and took photos of Christmas decorations in London and people walking around in winter clothes. She explained:

*I used to send cards for birthdays and Christmas. At Christmas I used to go to the shops and choose the very typical Christmas cards. You know those with snow, snowmen, you know, things that remind you of Christmas. I know for them it is not the same. There [in Brazil] it is hot in December, but the idea of Christmas is the one we have here [in London]. So, I liked to buy those cards of a white Christmas. (Patricia, 06/06/2013).*

Patricia recalled receiving Christmas cards from her mother as well. She explained:

*They also used to send me Christmas cards. The Christmas cards there also had these images of Christmas... like snow, snowmen... you know everyone has this image of Christmas and even there where it is boiling hot we do the same. But my mother used to send me cards with the image of the nativity scene. She used to say: ‘you can send cards with snow... here it is too hot’. (Patricia, 06/06/2013).*

The participants differentiated their writing and exchanging of Christmas cards (preparation, white snow, nativity scenes, wishes and messages) from other letters, as ways to mark they were celebrating Christmas with their family members in Brazil. In the Christmas cards they wrote best wishes for a ‘Merry Christmas’, as well as a good and successful New Year. Those wishes, for the Brazilian migrant women, had a special meaning of encouragement for them to continue their migratory journey. Elsa, a 54-year-old living in the UK since 1998, stated:

*At the end of the year it was good to receive the cards. I used to be very nostalgic, but the messages encouraged me, they were wishing me luck, to be strong to carry on, they used to write that they were missing me. I remember I used to cry a lot after reading the cards, then I used to leave them next to my bed for a while, usually until the 6<sup>th</sup> of January, you know the three kings day, then I used to store them in a small box that I still have. (Elsa, 25/11/2013).*

The Christmas cards, then, carried with them a constructed and distinct image of Christmas, which involved the ‘nativity scene’ and/or a ‘white Christmas’. They carried messages, good wishes, and for some of the Brazilian migrant women interviewed they also symbolized their family’s encouragement to them in their migration for another year. Finally, as happened with birthday cards, Christmas

cards worked as ‘materialization’ of the family connection during this important family time in the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s. They were usually left on display during the entire Christmas period, which for Brazilians starts one or two weeks before Christmas day (25<sup>th</sup> of December), when the Christmas tree is prepared and the decorations are put up, and finishes on 6<sup>th</sup> January, which represents the arrival of the three kings in Bethlehem with their gifts for the Baby Jesus.

The Christmas cards therefore were a ritualized form (as argued by Bell, 1992) for the Brazilian migrant women and their families in Brazil to celebrate this family occasion. They communicated symbolically the importance of their family connection and provided a sense of togetherness even from a distance. Like the letters and birthday cards, they were also stored. They were meaningful objects, capable of providing meaning which could be remembered and felt again. They had to be kept, as they worked to help build the family history of these families, a fact I noticed when during the fieldwork with the Brazilian migrant women they showed me several Christmas cards they had received from Brazil, and that they valued as significant material proof that they had celebrated Christmas with their family members. Besides writing and exchanging Christmas cards they also did Christmas by calling home, in the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s.

### *Calling home at Christmas*

The Brazilian migrant women in the UK recalled sending Christmas cards to their close family members in Brazil and receiving Christmas cards, usually written by their mothers, sisters and nieces. But besides the writing and exchanging of cards in the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s they emphasized the importance of calling their family in Brazil on Christmas day, a practice that was expected at Christmas as they were living geographically distant. During this period, as I have shown, making a telephone call was challenging, due to the high cost of international calls and the difficulties in accessing landlines for the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil. As previously mentioned, most of the Brazilian family members had acquired landlines by the mid-1990s, but the Brazilian migrant women were only able to have their own telephone with the arrival of mobile phones from the early and mid-2000s. A similar trend has been

noted in other migrant groups, for example, Filipino women (Madianou and Miller, 2011). Hence the Christmas telephone call had to be made by the Brazilian migrant women in the UK to their family members in Brazil, who were usually expecting such a call. Claudia, a 55-year-old living in the UK since 1986, noted:

*I used to always call on my mother's birthday and Christmas. These were sacred. I called to wish them Merry Christmas, and ask how the celebrations were. I remember calling my mother and my brother on Christmas day. I have always called them at Christmas. (Claudia, 09/07/2013).*

Angela emphasized that the week between Christmas and New Year was when she interacted more with her family in Brazil by telephone, to compensate for her absence:

*You know, when you live far from your family, you have to find ways to compensate for your absence, so at Christmas I remember I allowed myself to talk more, and I also called four times that week, like Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and New Year's Eve and Day. (Angela, 10/02/2014).*

Some of the distinctive features of the Christmas telephone call were the greetings and wishes of 'Merry Christmas', but also wanting to know about the Christmas celebrations. Ana Clara recalled her first Christmas in the UK, and her need to call her family in Brazil and hear about the details of the Christmas celebrations.

*I remember my first Christmas here. It was very sad. It was my first year here and I had to work on Christmas Eve, because I used to work as a waitress. It was the first time I had spent Christmas alone. I remember I finished my shift and I went home on a night bus, it was very late, cold and raining, so I arrived at the place I used to live and everybody was sleeping already. I cried a lot and thought what am I doing here. (Ana Clara, 04/06/2013)*

She continued:

*To compensate, I remember I spent two hours on the phone on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December. I asked my mother about every single detail. I wanted to know who went, who had cooked what (laughs). I wanted to know ... even though every year is the same (laughs). I asked about the gifts... everything. I felt better later. But, it is not an easy time of the year, it is the hardest time, even nowadays. I feel very nostalgic. (Ana Clara, 04/06/2013)*

Ana Clara's account assumes the sense of recoverable time and nostalgia about Christmas. Her statement reveals her need to reconnect to her past experiences of Christmas as noted by Gillis (1996). She did this by talking to her



mother about the Christmas celebrations and about the features which, for her, characterized her family's way of celebrating Christmas, as she reported:

*I felt better when my mother told me that my aunt had cooked the lamb, she had cooked cod, and a Russian salad. She described to me the Christmas tree, where she had decided to put it that year... They were all there, my mother, father, sisters, a few cousins and aunts, like it had always been. Ufa! (laugh and relief). (Ana Clara, 04/06/2013)*

These particular features ritualized annually by her family were considered as Christmas 'traditions' by Ana Clara's family. To know that her family's Christmas celebrations in Brazil were continuing much the same, even though she was not there, gave her a sense of continuity and belonging to the family. As Fiese (2006) notes, ritualistic practices are capable of providing a sense of belonging to a family. During her Christmas telephone call, she wished her relatives in Brazil 'Merry Christmas', she found out about the celebrations, and talked to her mother, father, sisters and some extended family members (aunts and cousins), and she momentarily got a 'liminal-like' sense (to use Turner 1982:64's term), which allowed her to feel that the distance had been minimized. This feeling was so meaningful for her that she remembered it as being significant for her constitution of the sense of familyhood at a distance. She said that after that first Christmas at work, she tried to negotiate to work on New Year's Eve instead of Christmas Eve. She remarked: 'New Year is not like Christmas where you are longing to be with your family' (04/06/2013). She explained:

*In fact, I spent Christmas Eve with friends, and it was nice. But it is not the same as celebrating with family, in the way it has always been done. So, on the 25<sup>th</sup> I had to call my mom and ask about the people, food, gifts. It was important for me. Now, with the Internet it is different, because I can actually go online on Christmas Eve and on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Now I can see everything. (Ana Clara, 04/06/2013)*

Similar to the birthday telephone calls, Christmas telephone calls allowed the participants to feel connected to their family members while they were sharing the conversation, a 'liminal-like' moment (to use Turner 1982:64's term). But, it still limited their possibility to spend longer periods interacting, and such interaction was limited to hearing each other's voices, and just a description of the celebrations and 'Christmas rites'. The emergence of new communication technologies, such as Skype, which allowed visual cues, simultaneity and

interactivity, transformed the transnational families' experiences of Christmas at a distance. In some cases, the Brazilian migrant women refused friends' invitations in order to spend Christmas Eve with their Brazilian family online on Skype. In other cases, they invited friends and local relatives (such as parents-in-law and siblings-in-law) to their house, so they could leave Skype online connected to their family in Brazil, and then participate in both celebrations.

### *Christmas and online 'Secret Santa'*

All of the Brazilian migrant women of this research said they had used webcam communication, via Skype, to celebrate Christmas with their family in Brazil from the mid-2000s onwards. As noted previously, after this new communication technology was incorporated by the Brazilian transnational families in the mid-2000s it rapidly took the place of telephone calls and eliminated the family practice of exchanging birthday and Christmas cards. As with birthdays, Christmas was considered by the participants of this research as a 'special' family time, which they more recently shared via Skype. Generally, I observed that the attraction of interacting via the webcam at Christmas was principally motivated by the opportunity to take part in it, by seeing and interacting with the 'Christmas rites' that made up each of the participants' family Christmases. As Fiese et al. (2002: 382) note, the symbols used in the performance of a family ritual such as Christmas communicate meaning, which provides the families with an idea of 'who they are as a group'.

Zilda and her sister Amanda explained about their Christmas experiences on Skype for the previous three years. Zilda recalled with enthusiasm sharing her preparations for Christmas with her mother (Beatriz) and sister (Amanda). She showed them her Christmas tree<sup>35</sup>, her living room decorated with Christmas candles, gifts bought and wrapped near the tree, and the food she would cook:

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<sup>35</sup> According to Gillis, the history of the Christmas tree was a tradition imported from Germany by British royalty earlier in the century, and it was in the 1880s that it became part of Christmas in every middle-class home. He argues that the Christmas tree, which was a symbol of nature, was domesticated to the extent that the family no longer had to go outdoors or to the countryside. For him, nature entered the space in the home to reinforce the image of the family as the most natural and enduring of all the institutions of urban life. Thus, Christmas was 'symbolically bridging the gap between town and country, while at the same time expanding time, bringing the past into the present as no other modern holiday could do'. (Gillis, 1996:101).

*It is very good now that I can show them my decorations. Christmas decorations here are so beautiful. Here [in London] we can light candles and hang up a lot of lights. I know in Brazil there are a lot of lights, but nobody lights candles. It is so hot there. So, I did my Christmas tree, and I put candles all over it and showed my mom and my sister on Skype. They were enchanted. It is very good that I can share these moments. Now they can actually see it. I felt happy that they could see how my house was, and how we were getting ready for Christmas. (Zilda, 23/07/2013).*

As well as sharing in the preparations of symbolic elements that they recognized as constituting and marking their Christmas celebrations, some participants reported actually taking part in the Christmas celebrations by Skype. Amanda, Zilda's sister, remembered their last Christmas experience together on Skype, and how they were able to practice 'Secret Santa', named by her as '*amigo secreto*' ('Secret friend'), a moment when all of the family members exchange gifts. It was considered by them as a 'traditional' Christmas family rite, and for Zilda and Amanda it was the way to celebrate Christmas that they had learnt from their parents in their childhood:

*Every year we do 'Secret friend', here it is Secret Santa. It is a tradition of our family. We are usually thirty people for Christmas. So, last year we decided that we would do our Secret Santa here and they would do one there, with her family and her husband's parents, but we would leave Skype on, so we could see their Secret Santa and they could see our Secret Santa. There, because her husband's parents were not used to it, they did theirs earlier; they did not wait until midnight, because her father-in-law, who is English, was sleeping. It was funny! So we watched theirs and then later we started to do our Secret Santa. They watched and they loved it. It was fun, because they could be with us and we with them. (Amanda, 06/12/2014)*

The rite of 'Secret Santa' as a particular feature of Christmas was also mentioned by another participant, Flavia, a 46-year-old living in the UK since 1996, who reported taking part in the 'Secret Santa' via Skype. She revealed the importance of sharing this time of year with her family in Brazil to continue her sense of familyhood, as well as to show her daughters how her family in Brazil celebrated it. She explained how she asked her sister to turn on Skype on Christmas Eve because she wanted to show her daughters in the UK how her family in Brazil celebrated Christmas, as they no longer had the opportunity to visit Brazil for this

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'family ritual'. She cited the high prices of flight tickets and the short school holidays in December as the main reasons for not being able to go to Brazil for Christmas.

Thus, Flavia went online on Skype to show her daughters the image she had of Christmas. In this sense, more than just reconnecting herself to the Christmas experiences of her own childhood, Flavia disclosed the importance of passing on this experience to the second generation. Hence, going online on Skype made it possible for her daughters to get visual cues of how Christmas celebrations were practised by Flavia's family members in Brazil. Her daughters would not just be relying on their mother's description or memories, but in fact were able to see Christmas being celebrated in real time. As Fiese (2006) argues, one of the elements of a family ritual is the importance of passing it on to other generations, as a meaningful practice which is constitutive of family. Flavia said:

*Now that my daughters are older; the oldest is 16, and the next one is 13 and the youngest 10 - last year on Christmas Eve I turned on Skype to show them how my family in Brazil celebrated Christmas. I asked my sister to leave Skype on. So, we talked to my family. It was very nice because my daughters could see how people do Christmas in Brazil. We spent the evening watching them exchange gifts. My family, for example, every year does Secret Santa, and it is very funny. Even though we were not there, we were participating. I think it is interesting because it makes you keep the ties closer, and even my daughters who had never been to Brazil at Christmas now know how it is, how we celebrate it. (Flavia, 31/05/2013)*

However, as I showed in Chapter 4, Skype interaction can lead to some ambivalent feelings. Amanda, Zilda's sister, pointed out one of the limitations of sharing a family gathering such as Christmas online on Skype, which was the lack of attention. She said: '*it was nice to share the Secret Santa with Zilda, but I have to say, there was a moment when nobody from here [Brazil] was giving them much attention*' (Amanda, 06/12/2014). She stressed that the visual cues, simultaneity and interactivity represented for her an improvement in their family interactions during Christmas, which made her feel closer: '*it was good to talk, see, and share the moment together*', but still '*there are some limitations that the technology cannot overcome*'. She explained further:

*Skype is good, very, very good, when you are sharing things, giving your attention. But, later, as we got involved in the party, we could not give them the attention needed, like looking at the*

*camera. So, I think they got bored. I think, next time, we will be together but not for the entire thing.* (Amanda, 06/12/2014).

Thus, celebrating Christmas on Skype was reported by the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil as a way to celebrate this family ritual from the mid-2000s onwards. It was how they took part in the family's annual calendar from a distance. This practice was capable of providing visual cues as to how Christmas was performed in their families, which could connect these families to their past in Brazil, but could also pass it on to the next generations, creating and recreating these family memories and history (Imber-Black and Roberts, 1998; Fiese, 2006). It allowed them to share some ritualistic features, such as symbolic objects and affective communication, leaving them with a sense of togetherness and identity, saying 'this is who we are as a group' (Fiese, 2002:383). However, it was not without its ambiguity. It provided a sense of co-presence and sharing of Christmas, but 'doing' Christmas on Skype still demands looking at the camera, which can provide a feeling of being there, but not being given full attention. As well as celebrating Christmas on Skype, some of the Brazilian migrant women of this research said that they had spent Christmas in person with their families in Brazil.

### ***Going home for Christmas***

*It was difficult. She went there and it was not easy to come to visit us. She spent four years without coming back. We miss her a lot. I remember the first, second years of Christmas without her. We all miss her, we are a very close family, and we enjoy parties so it was hard. But we used to be waiting for her call; we knew she would call at Christmas. We knew it was difficult for her to come in the beginning. But her first visit after these four years was at Christmas time.* (Beatriz, Zilda's mother, 06/12/2014).

Zilda's mother's account shows how the physical absence of her daughter was strongly felt by the family members in Brazil, particularly during her first years of migration. It was particularly painful and sad during family rituals such as Christmas, as Beatriz's account above illustrates. Christmas was mentioned by all the Brazilian migrant women of this study as the family ritual which they deeply missed spending together in Brazil. This corroborates the findings of Assis (1999) about Brazilians in the US. For the Brazilian family members in this study,

Christmas was mentioned as the annual family ritual most expected to be spent with the whole family, and they had high expectations regarding the attendance of their migrant daughter or sister. I noticed that it was much more expected that the Brazilian migrant women would go to Brazil for Christmas rather than the Brazilian relatives travelling to the UK. This is noticeable in the account of Beatriz (Zilda's 76-year-old mother living in Brazil) who explained:

*It is better that they come here than I go there. She's invited me many times to go there, but it is better that they come here, because everybody is here [in Brazil], so they can see everyone here. If I go there, I will be far from the rest of my children, and grandchildren. So, it is better they come here, so everybody can be together. (Beatriz, 06/12/2014).*

While going to Brazil to celebrate Christmas involved a number of difficulties, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, some of the Brazilian migrant daughters whose mothers were elderly and ill or very fragile highlighted that they had made an effort to go to Brazil for Christmas every year in the last five to seven years. This was the case for Claudia, Lucia and Fatima. Other participants also reported going to Brazil for Christmas, but it was more random, every two years, or more sporadically. Claudia stated her reasons for going to Brazil at Christmas:

*My mother is 80 now. So I like to go for Christmas to be with her. I spend three weeks there. I always try to arrive before the 14<sup>th</sup> of December, because it is my mother's birthday and I stay until the first week of January so I can be there for Christmas and New Year. I always go with a bag of gifts for everyone, which I give them at Christmas. It is important for me to be there at Christmas, because nowadays I do not know if she will be here next Christmas. (Claudia, 09/07/2013).*

They mentioned that to celebrate Christmas in Brazil was important. As Fatima said: *'I was away from London, I gained strength to be with my family, and then to go back'* (03/06/2013). Thus, visiting at Christmas was reported by the Brazilian women as a way of engaging with the symbols and affective meanings of Christmas, which meant that they 'gained strength' to go back to London, as they had reinforced their family ties. Thus, it was highlighted by them as important to reaffirm that they were still part of the family and valued this, even though they were living far apart for long periods.

To sum up, like birthdays, Christmas was considered as a family ritual by the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil, which they practised during their entire migration. As observed with the birthdays, the ways of doing Christmas changed along with the communication technologies. Thus, in the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s the Brazilian transnational families in this study practised the Christmas traditions with the writing and exchanging of Christmas cards and telephone calls. The incorporation of new technologies, such as Skype, transformed the Christmas celebrations of these transnational families, allowing them to share the Christmas rites with their families, such as: showing the Christmas tree, Christmas decorations, food and taking part in the ‘Secret friend’. Finally, visiting relatives was also done to celebrate Christmas. This was especially important for the Brazilian migrants whose mothers were very elderly.

**Table 5.2 Summarizing the main forms and features of Christmas celebrations**

<b>Writing and exchange of Christmas cards</b>	<b>Features/ Arrangements</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Participants Gender and age</b>	<b>Capacity/ opportunity</b>	<b>Symbolic and affective meanings</b>
	In the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s  Need for planning and organization well in advance	<b>Greetings:</b> Merry Christmas, good wishes, blessings and symbols of love (drawing of hearts and kisses); Images of ‘idealized’ Christmas (snow, snowmen, nativity scene)	<b>Both ways:</b> from the Brazilian migrant women to the close family members in Brazil (parents and siblings)  from the family members, mainly mothers and sisters	<b>Facilities:</b> Literacy Low cost  <b>Barriers:</b> Time-consuming shopping and writing; Long time to arrive; loss of cards	Emotional ‘work’ (choosing, buying, thinking what to write, writing and posting);  Materiality of Christmas cards: proof of family connection; construction of material traces for the family memory and history of participation in family annual calendar
<b>Making a Telephone call</b>	In the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s  Need for planning and organization in advance	<b>Greetings:</b> Merry Christmas, blessings and good wishes  Description of the celebration: Who was there; The gifts; The food; The decorations	<b>One way:</b> from the Brazilian migrant women to close family members in Brazil (parents and siblings)	<b>Difficulties:</b> High cost; Public places negotiation (phone booths, phone shops); Private places negotiation (landlady and flatmates); Neighbours’ landline	Feeling of ‘rightness’ and togetherness; Hearing the voices: sense of closeness, ( <i>‘liminal-like’</i> moment)  Feeling of resentment and lack of consideration (when not practised)

					Oral proof of family interaction on birthdays
<b>Going online on Skype</b>	From the mid-2000s onwards  Need for planning and coordination	<b>Greetings and reproduction of Christmas rites:</b>  Showing decorations, Christmas tree, Christmas candles, gifts, food  Participation in Secret Santa	<b>Both ways:</b> The Brazilian migrant women to the family gathering in Brazil (nuclear and extended family); and family members to the family gathering in the UK, but with more focus on the Brazilian gathering.	<b>Facilities:</b> Immediacy and interactivity Sharing voices and images  <b>Barriers:</b> Elderly parents in Brazil dependent on local adult children and carers	Sense of co-presence Sense of togetherness  Sense of rightness  Feeling of resentment and neglect (when not practised)  'Transfer' of Christmas rites to second generation  Ambivalent feelings of togetherness and 'imprisonment' on the screen
<b>Visiting</b>	Need for planning and organization in advance	Sharing of the moment physically: food preparation, decoration, gift exchange.	<b>One way:</b> Brazilian migrant women to Brazil. Celebration with nuclear and extended family	<b>Facilities/Barriers</b> High price of flight tickets Long journey Work negotiations Migration status	Reinforce physically the family ties to continue the migration

Source: Self-elaboration

### Concluding remarks

In this second empirical chapter, I have shown how the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil practised family rituals such as birthdays and Christmas at a distance. Indeed, as argued by Cheal (2008) and Gillis (1996), birthdays and Christmas have been historically, culturally and socially constructed as 'special' family times. They have allowed the ritualization of family ties on an annual basis, and have become part of the family's annual calendar. In the case of Brazil, the celebration of birthdays and Christmas as family rituals, in terms of history, is recent. It started from the first half of the twentieth century. Before that, only the elite celebrated their birthdays and Christmas, and they were much more connected and understood as religious practices. However, this notion changed with the process of industrialization, urbanization and the mass migration from Europe to Brazil. At that time the need arose to ritualize the family and then mark family moments as separate from other moments of life. Birthdays and Christmas, then, were gradually constructed as family rituals in Brazil (Del Priori, 1994; Itani, 2003; Scott, 2013; Pinsky, 2013).



Birthdays and Christmas were reported by the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil as being significant family rituals, which they continued to practise despite being geographically distant for long periods of time. As Bell (1992) argues about rituals in general, birthdays and Christmas here are not considered as existing as a natural category of human practice. They are understood as a way of acting which can be constructed and reconstructed by a group (in this case the family) as different from other acts. The group studied here identified them as being important in the construction of their sense of familyhood. As birthdays and Christmas have been constructed as family rituals, I have argued that they do not have intrinsic features that define them all the time and/or have rigid ways of being practised. In fact, as I have noted, they can be practised in different forms. What makes them ritualistic practices are the particular features that differentiate them from other practices, the fact of being performed by family members, carrying symbolic and affective values, and leaving traces considered by the participants as being important to their constitution of a sense of familyhood.

Thus, in the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s, the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil reported celebrating birthdays and Christmas by the writing and exchanging of birthday and Christmas cards and making telephone calls on the birthday or on Christmas Eve/Christmas Day. In order to mark that they were celebrating a birthday or Christmas, these practices were given particular features. Exchanging birthday and Christmas cards and telephone calls on those occasions were distinguished from the ones of 'small days' (Costa, 2011:95). They included specific messages (e.g. happy birthday, Merry Christmas). They also carried 'special' wishes, were directed to one person (in the case of birthdays) or shared with the extended family (at Christmas), and were only repeated once a year to mark these significant family rituals in their family's annual calendar.

In the case of birthday and Christmas cards, their symbolic and affective meaning for the family was shown in the fact that they were put on display during the birthday or Christmas time, as a sign of their family commitment and relationships even living at a distance. Furthermore, the materiality of the birthday and Christmas cards was also considered meaningful because they served as 'proof' that they had celebrated these significant family rituals. Although birthdays and

Christmas are no longer marked by the exchanging of cards, these were still reported as meaningful objects for the families. They were kept safe as they were considered important for these families in the construction of their family memories and history.

Birthdays and Christmas were also celebrated by the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil by telephone calls. What distinguished birthday telephone calls from other calls was that they were directed to the person who was having the birthday, and they included the greeting of 'happy birthday', special wishes, and talking about the birthday celebrations. In the case of the telephone calls at Christmas, the distinguishing features were that they were not directed to one person, but usually tried to involve talking with all the family members present on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. They involved finding out about the celebration details, such as the food, gifts and decorations. The birthday and Christmas telephone calls, with their particular features, were repeated annually along with the writing and exchanging of birthday and Christmas cards up to the mid-2000s. As with the birthday and Christmas cards, the telephone calls for these family rituals were noted by the participants of this study as having symbolic and affective meaningful for them. They momentarily allowed them to have a sense of togetherness with their family in Brazil. In addition, the birthday and Christmas telephone calls were reported as leaving oral traces to constitute their family history. They acted as oral 'proof' of their connections for these important annual family rituals.

From the mid-2000s onwards, the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil started to share birthdays and Christmas via Skype. The practice of going online on Skype on birthdays and at Christmas changed their way of being celebrated at a distance. The visual cues, simultaneity and interactivity of Skype allowed the participants of this research to share more intensively some historically, culturally and biographically constructed birthday and Christmas rites, which were particular to their own families, that they identified as being part of their family birthday and Christmas celebrations. In the case of birthdays, they sang 'happy birthday' together, they included a celebration cake, shared the blowing-out of the candles, and were able to see the gifts and birthday sweets. During the Christmas celebrations on Skype the participants shared the 'secret friend' activity, and

compared decorations, food and gifts. Celebrating birthdays and Christmas on Skype allowed them to (re)construct and (re)signify some family birthday and Christmas rites.

Thus, in this chapter, I showed that the Brazilian migrant women in this study and their family members in Brazil ritualized annual family practices at a distance. Family rituals such as birthdays and Christmas were practised by them in various forms to mark that they had taken part in their family's annual calendar even from a distance. All the forms of practising them were important to the constitution and reconstitution of their sense of familyhood at a distance. In the next chapter, I discuss how the Brazilian migrant women and their family members practised family life-cycle rituals such as marriage, the birth of children, and funerals, and the importance of these to their sense of familyhood.

## Chapter 6

### Doing life-cycle family rituals

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In this last empirical chapter, I discuss how the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil practised ‘life-cycle rituals’ (Imber-Black and Roberts, 1998: 21) as family rituals from a distance. According to Gillis (1996) and Cheal (1998b; 2008), life-cycle moments such as marriages, births and deaths have been historically, culturally and socially constructed as family rituals. In general, they argue that until the late nineteenth century, marriages, births and deaths involved ritualized practices, which were much more identified with the community and religion (as have been largely studied in anthropology, for example, by Van Gennep, 1965 [1909] and Turner, 1969). But according to Gillis (1996), Cheal (1998b; 2008) and Morgan (2011b), by the beginning of the twentieth century these practices in Western societies had gradually become framed as important family rituals marking the life-course of families, to be lived out and ritualized among family members. Indeed, the ‘special’ meaning of these moments were constructed as practised among family members.

According to these scholars, the transformation introduced by industrialization, urbanization and the division of labour, the emergence of the nuclear family as a privileged model, and the valorisation of the idea of ‘sweet home’ made these life-cycle rituals important to the constitution of the sense of familyhood. These life-cycle have been considered as meaningful actions that help family members to cope with transformations in their lives.

According to scholars on family studies, such as Wolin and Bennett (1984), life-cycle moments as family rituals are classified as part of family celebrations. They vary among countries and cultures and are the most stylized, organized and less frequent ritualized practices. For Imber-Black and Roberts (1998), they are family times often celebrated with nuclear and extended family members, and mark major transitions of family life. Gillis (1996) also affirms that they belong to the

cyclical calendar of the family's life-course. Costa (2011:253) considers them as family rituals which belong to what she calls 'big days'. They usually involve expectations about the way they will be practised, and historically and culturally constructed symbols that differentiate them from other events.

As Imber-Black and Roberts (1998) affirm, a wedding is viewed as a family ritual to celebrate a marriage and mark that a son or a daughter has transformed into a married adult. Similarly, the birth event has become a family ritual to celebrate the baby's new life and entrance into the family, as well as to designate new roles for parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. Finally, there are the funerals, which are family rituals that mark and are meant to heal the loss of a loved family member.

Although family life in general, and Brazilian family life in particular, has undergone new configurations and dynamics in more recent times (as described in Chapter 1), and living geographically distant is one of them, life-cycle events are still considered important ritualized practices to mark family moments. The Brazilian migrant women studied here described their engagement at a distance in those life-cycle events, as important family times. Thus, in this chapter, I intend to answer the question of how the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil took part in these life-cycle family rituals, in particular weddings, births and funerals.

### **1. Weddings as family rituals**

Similar to birthdays and Christmas, weddings, as suggested by Cheal (2008) and Gillis (1996), have been historically, culturally and socially constructed as family rituals. Gillis (1996) states that until the late nineteenth century, a wedding was not an event for the family, but much more for the community. However, he notes that by the beginning of the twentieth century, weddings had become, particularly among middle class, associated with special times for families and started to be held more often on weekends and holidays rather than on weekdays, to highlight their symbolic importance. This new form of marking a marriage allowed families to gather from afar, and weddings became more familial and less communal. For example, weddings were no longer celebrated at the house, but in places specially rented, decorated and prepared for the occasion. He states that

weddings, particularly for middle-class families, became important moments for family gatherings. It became the most frequently photographed event, with the wedding album representing the couple themselves and the family union.

In Brazil, marriage celebrations as family rituals became more widely spread from the mid-twentieth century onwards, previously they were a privilege of the patriarchal elite families (Sarti, 1995; Ribeiro and Torres Ribeiro, 1995). As I have described regarding other family rituals, such as birthday and Christmas celebrations, in Brazil the process of urbanization, industrialization and the mass arrival of European migrants made the 'modern conjugal family', or the nuclear family, the model for families. In this model, the marriage celebration became an important family time to mark the couple's 'love relationships' and the family union (Dessen and Torres, 2002; Dessen, 2010; Scott, 2013).

The celebration of marriage, therefore, became part of the life of the middle and lower middle-class families in Brazil. It became an important event to mark the constitution of the 'modern conjugal family'. As I have shown (in Chapter 1), this family model started to be questioned in Brazil, mainly from the late 1960s, due to various changes in Brazilian women's biography. As stated, marriage was no longer the only and most desirable outcome for Brazilian women. Although, it was no longer their main or only option, the practice has not diminished. It is still practised in various forms and is still important as a special family event (Pinsky, 2013a, 2013b; Araújo, 2002).

Generally, the Brazilian migrant women participants in this research migrated to the UK in their early or mid-twenties, and they were single and/or had cohabited with a partner. Of the participants, only Flavia came to the UK because her fiancé lived here previously. Thus, some of the Brazilian women interviewed for this research got married during their migration, and they highlighted their marriage celebration as an important family time, which they shared with their Brazilian family members. They considered it important for their constitution of transnational family life with their family members in Brazil. The weddings were therefore memorable family moments, celebrated with their family, either in Brazil or in the UK. Mand (2002), a scholar who has studied transnational marriages, argues regarding the wedding experience in a global household context:

A wedding is an important event for members of a household to celebrate; it marks a particular moment in a household's life cycle when new alliances are created and existing networks are renewed (Mand, 2002: 234).

The celebratory moment of marriage, which includes the preparations, the actual gathering and the post-ritual sharing of memories, has been overlooked by the literature on transnational families. Only a few studies have addressed the features and negotiations involved in transnational marriage celebrations, and how it is constitutive of the transnational families (Olwig, 2002; Mand, 2012). The Brazilian migrant women recalled during their interviews how they had celebrated their own weddings and those of significant family members.

### *The Brazilian migrants' weddings in Brazil*

According to Olwig (2002), the wedding as a family ritual is particularly significant when it takes place in the origin country or family home as it is the 'centre of social and economic relations as well as a locus of emotional attachment for the individual family' (Olwig, 2002:205). Some of the Brazilian migrant women reported that their weddings were held in Brazil in the late 1990s, or in the early 2000s, but the preparation stages were carried out by them from a distance by telephone calls and exchanges of e-mails. They recalled the wedding preparation period as being a significant moment, when their interaction with their family members in Brazil intensified. This period was marked by negotiating the wedding arrangements, such as deciding whether to have a religious wedding or not, setting up the wedding location, negotiating the list of guests, choosing the wedding invitations, the reception, the food, the decorations, the clothing, and so on.

Most of the participants whose weddings were held in Brazil stressed that the preparation stages involved telephone discussions about whether to have a religious wedding. Flavia said: *'for me it was very important to marry in Brazil in my church'* (31/05/2013), and Zilda also emphasized this: *'It was fantastic to marry in Brazil, to have all my family, to be blessed in the church'* (23/07/2013). Nevertheless, other participants instead chose to celebrate their weddings without the religious ritual. Angela, a 52-year-old living in the UK since 1988, got married in Brazil in 1996. She explained: *'I and my husband thought we would like to have a wedding in Brazil and we saved for that, but we did not want a religious wedding,*

*we were not religious people*' (10/02/2014). She recalled this decision as being part of the preparation stage and said it was her first negotiation with her family in Brazil regarding her wedding. She explained that her family had a strong Catholic background, and expected her to get married in the Catholic Church – a tendency that has seen changes in the last twenty years in Brazil (Araújo, 2002). However, her husband's family (Brazilian) were Pentecostals. To overcome this problem, she called her parents and used the limited time period they were able to stay in Brazil as a 'legitimate excuse' (Finch, 1989) for not having a religious wedding:

*It would have taken ages to find a church date, and in the Catholic Church we had to do a course, and how would we do it from here? So that was what I told my parents, and in the end they agreed. But we did not actually want a religious wedding.* (Angela, 10/02/2014).

Another preparation point of long negotiation with family members in Brazil was the actual location of the wedding. Angela noted that in her case it was a matter of several telephone calls. She and her husband were both Brazilians, but from different states in Brazil. She was from a southern state and her husband from a south-eastern state, with more than 2,200km distance between their home cities, where their parents, some siblings and extended family lived. She explained:

*At the beginning, I insisted that the wedding should be in my city. You know the tradition is that the wedding should be in the bride's city.* (Angela, 10/02/2014)

She continued:

*[...] then we started to make the guest list, and his family was much larger than mine, so I called my home in Brazil, I bought two phone cards that day, and I explained it first to my sister, and then to my parents. They did not like it, so I was very uncertain, I even thought about giving up on the wedding idea, but after some more talking, they understood that it was easier, also we planned to marry in July, and it would be cold in my city and in his city the weather would be better.* (Angela, 10/02/2014)

Furthermore, the preparation stage also involved intense negotiations with the family members in Brazil regarding the guest lists. Unlike the other preparation points which were discussed by telephone, the guest list was for some of the participants arranged by e-mail. Fernanda, a 39-year-old living in the UK since 1999, who got married in 2001 in Brazil, recalled exchanging e-mails with her sister, who printed them out and discussed it with their parents. Fernanda



commented that she and her sister exchanged a number of e-mails until they were sure they had not forgotten any significant people. A wedding in Brazil usually involves inviting members of the nuclear and extended family and friends (Pinsky, 2013b), thus the Brazilian migrant women who held their weddings in Brazil, reported having to be particularly careful with their guest list, as it could have created feelings of resentment if they forgot someone important in their family, as described by Fernanda:

*I wanted something small. I and my husband were from the same city in Brazil and we wanted something for fifty guests maximum. So to do the guest list was a challenge, particularly to convince them that we did not want something big, and I also could not forget people. We did not have the money to do something big, but as we had decided we did not want to return to Brazil any time soon, we thought it would be nice to do something with the family, to mark our union. (Fernanda, 02/08/2013).*

Other elements which were part of the preparation stage were the wedding invitation cards and the confirmations on the guest list. Fernanda recalled that she bought her wedding invitations in the UK and sent them to her sister in Brazil, who together with her mother arranged a professional writer to handwrite the wedding cards. In addition to the wedding invitations, which her mother and sister delivered to the relatives and friends invited, Fernanda sent e-mails to confirm the guests' attendance. Checking the family members' availability to attend the wedding was mentioned by the participants as an important part of the preparation stage. Zilda, who married a British citizen, explained that their wedding was held in Brazil on a date when her husband's parents and his sister could travel from the UK to Brazil to attend the marriage celebration.

Similarly, Fernanda, whose sister lived in Portugal, noted the importance of arranging a suitable date to make it possible for her sister to attend her wedding. This corroborates the findings of Olwig (2002) and Mand (2002) which highlighted the importance of setting a wedding date convenient for transnational and local relatives. Thus, the Brazilian migrant women noted that the preparations for their weddings that were held in Brazil usually involved debates with parents and sisters about the wedding location, whether it should be religious, the invitations and the guest list. This preparation time was highlighted by the participants as a 'special' and significant moment, which they recalled sharing with their relatives in Brazil.

For these participants the actual wedding day was held during a visit to Brazil and it was described by some of the migrant women as a celebration in a 'traditional' form (as I have described, this 'tradition' was something that had been historically and culturally constructed). The key features that they recalled as marking it as the celebration of a wedding were that it was a special family time, they got married in a 'white dress', the reception included wedding symbols such as the wedding cake, as well as the traditional dance of the couple. But what they stressed as the most important thing about their wedding was that they were celebrating it with their nuclear and extended family members (aunts, uncles, cousins). Zilda's mother (Beatriz, 76 years old, living in Brazil) and sister (Amanda, 55 years old, living in Brazil), recalled Zilda's wedding as a 'special' family event, where the family had become united to *'make it happen'*.

One particular point mentioned by the Brazilian migrant women regarding their weddings was the wedding gifts, which were in the form of financial help with the wedding costs, or money donations, rather than accessories for the new couple's house, as they would not be able to take those gifts with them. As Zilda's extract below explains:

*I am very glad that we got married in Brazil, because all the family were there with us. We are religious. I got married in a white dress, in church [Evangelical], my father walked me up the aisle, every one of my family helped, and all the family were there – aunts, uncles, cousins. We did not have much money, and the money we had we saved to go to the US. I wanted to re-migrate to the US and I wanted to have a wedding in Brazil, before we went. So, one sister gave me the flowers, another paid for the cake, another paid for the drinks and the other one for the pies. These were their gifts for us, and it was fantastic, because I could not take gifts with me. It was special to have the wedding with my family (Zilda, 23/07/2013).*

The Brazilian migrant women said that their weddings marked for them a transitional moment in their life cycle. Indeed, their wedding, as a family ritual, was memorable as not only marking their transition to formal conjugality, but also to the migratory process more permanently. As Beatriz (Zilda's mother) confirmed: *'once she got married and they went to US, and later returned to the UK, I knew she would never return to Brazil'* (06/12/2014). Angela's mother, Maria (76 years old, living in Brazil) also said: *'we were glad that they came to marry here, we had a party together, but it was a sign they did not want to return'* (10/12/2014). Having

the wedding in Brazil was mentioned by the Brazilian migrant women and their family members as helping to reconnect and reaffirm them as a family. Also mentioned was the fact that they would be engaging in a longer migration journey, which seemed much more permanent than when they first migrated.

Besides sharing the preparations and the actual gathering with their family members in Brazil, the Brazilian migrant women recalled that their weddings were also important to their constitution of a sense of familyhood because of the post-ritual moment. Imber-Black and Roberts (1998) and Fiese (2006) stress that a family ritual leaves traces that constitute the family memories and history. In the telling of their stories about their weddings, looking at and showing me the photographs and/or videos, the Brazilian women and their family members emphasized the highly symbolic and affective meaning of this family ritual for them. Moreover, they highlighted the importance of the wedding to their family constitution, because it produced 'hardcopy' memories, such as the wedding photo albums and videos. The Brazilian migrant women emphasized that those objects were central in marking for them the beginning of their '*own family*', but also representing the continued linkage with their family in Brazil, even after years of geographical separation.

Thus, their wedding photo albums and video recordings were recalled as being an important archive of who had attended their wedding and how they had celebrated it. They worked like the letters, birthday and Christmas cards, as material 'proof' of their family's interaction, in a life-cycle family ritual which marked their family's life-course. As Mand (2012:187) who studied the role of wedding videos in transnational marriages, has argued:

[the] wedding video, or photographs, capture the movement of people and objects, which in turn shape ritual practices. It is in this context we can view wedding videos as objects that record mobility and associated status. Furthermore, along with mobility across spaces, the wedding video collapses time, enabling those who were absent to be part of the wedding, whilst as objects, they propagate 'norms' surrounding ritual practices on a transnational stage.

To sum up, the Brazilian migrant women whose weddings were held in Brazil in the mid and late 1990s and early 2000s recalled them as a 'special' family time, which they noted as having particular characteristics. Sharing this family

ritual with their family members in Brazil was of particular importance for their family's constitution and reconstitution at a distance. The preparation stage was organized and negotiated via telephone calls and e-mails mainly with the mothers and sisters. They mentioned the actual ritual celebrations as including some historically and culturally constructed traditions and symbols, even in the case of non-religious weddings; the Brazilian migrant women reported that they got married in a white dress, their father 'gave them away' to their husband, the reception included the nuclear and extended family, and the food was 'traditional' wedding food, cakes and sweets.

Celebrating their wedding with their family in Brazil was important for them to reaffirm to their family members that although they were about to engage on a more permanent migration journey, they still had a strong allegiance to their family. I observed this in the importance given by the family members in Brazil to the migrant's wedding, and also the strong value the Brazilian migrant women placed on their photo albums and video recordings as 'proof' of their family's interaction and connection. Furthermore, some of the Brazilian migrant women mentioned taking part in the weddings of family members which they also highlighted as being important to their sense of familyhood at a distance.

### ***Family members' weddings***

In migration studies the active role of migrants in sending money for weddings is usually reported (see Charsley, 2006), but this was not found to be the case among the Brazilian migrant women in this research. They explained that in fact their financial situation was more precarious than that of their family members in Brazil. Thus it was not expected that they would take part in their family members' weddings by helping financially, but it was strongly expected that they would take part in the wedding stages. Some of the Brazilian migrant women interviewed mentioned siblings' weddings, and in some cases those of 'close' nieces or cousins were mentioned as important family times which they shared with their family members in Brazil. They recalled sharing to different degrees the three distinct stages of their family members' weddings. In the cases where being physically together at the actual wedding in Brazil was not possible, I noted that the

Brazilian migrant women stressed trying to fully engage in the preparation and post-ritual stages.

Patricia, a 41-year-old living in the UK since 1995, Angela, a 52-year-old living in the UK since 1988, and Elsa, a 54-year-old living in the UK since 1998, whose siblings got married in Brazil in the mid and late 1990s mentioned that their interaction by telephone with the family in Brazil increased, particularly in the weeks before the actual wedding day, as they wanted to participate in the preparation stage. Angela, who attended her brother's wedding, recalled how in the month before her brother's wedding, she engaged in the preparation stage through phone calls, as she wanted to know the developments and details of her brother's wedding, and to negotiate her own preparations with her family members. For example, she recalled describing the clothes she would wear, the accommodation arrangements, asking her mother to set up a hairdresser's appointment, etc. Another participant, Elsa, mentioned that she had actively engaged in the negotiation of her sibling's wedding date. She commented:

*When he told me he was getting married I told him, 'you have to do it when I can come, you cannot set a date when I cannot come'. Thus, we talked and talked and he gave me some dates he wanted to get married, then I checked with my work, and I told him the best date for me, so he set his wedding on that date. (Elsa, 25/11/2013).*

Those who were able to physically attend their siblings' actual weddings in Brazil reported them as 'special' moments when they shared and reconnected with their family members. Elsa said: *'it was fantastic to be there, to be with them, going through together, the party'*. Angela recorded: *'It was tiring, because you had to find a place to sleep, the house was full, but it was good in the end, you felt you were part of it'*. Thus, attendance at significant family members' weddings was seen as extremely desirable and was undertaken by some of the participants of this research. As Helena's account describes:

*[...] it is extremely difficult not being present for these special moments. Those are the moments you realize you live far away, and it is not just for that moment per se, but for all the small rites which that moment involves. (Helena, 08/05/2013)*

Like Angela and Elsa, Helena and Patricia stressed the importance of taking part in a sibling's wedding and sharing the preparation stage by discussing the wedding celebration, the location, the guest list, and the decorations. But unlike Angela and Elsa, they were not able to attend their brother's wedding in Brazil. Trying to compensate for their absence, they called their brothers, mothers, and sister-in-law several times during the actual wedding day. Patricia said *'I wanted to know how things were going, I wanted to take part somehow'*. She also stressed that, besides the telephone calls at the preparation stage and on the actual wedding day, she wanted to show that her brother's wedding was a 'special' day for her too and she recalled how she had prepared and sent a 'special' card and a *'nice meaningful gift'*. She asked her brother to send her photos and a video of his wedding, to emphasize that it was a meaningful moment for her that she wanted to take part in, even from a distance.

*I did not go to my brother's wedding, because my daughter was too young to travel for twelve hours. But I wanted to do something special for him, so after thought and thought, I bought a wedding card and I wrote to him how special he was to me, and I found a very nice picture of both of us of when he had come here to London, and sent it. I, my husband, and my daughter (I stamped her hand) signed the card. For the gift, I bought a decoration piece, he said he liked it when he was here. It was something small, because it couldn't be a big gift, but I think he understood the meaning. It was special for him, because he was emotional when we talked on the phone after he had received it. I also asked him to send me photos of the wedding, and make a copy of the DVD (Patricia, 06/06/2013).*

More recently, from the mid-2000s onwards, some of the Brazilian migrant women reported engaging in the preparation stage of family members' weddings, such as those of nieces, by talking on Skype. This had allowed them to have more visual cues of the wedding preparations, as Helena describes below. However, none of the participants reported taking part in the actual wedding by Skype, as they had done with birthdays and Christmas. Helena's account also highlights that in the case of celebrating the wedding of a significant family member, unlike birthdays and Christmas, writing and sending a card is still considered meaningful.

*I have a niece who just got married. We would like to have gone, but because the children were in school, we could not. But we talked a lot on Skype; we sent her a beautiful card that I and my daughter wrote, and a gift. But, because she got pregnant and the family did not accept*

*it well, I tried to talk to her several times. And, now, with the new technology I saw where the party was going to be held, and the decorations they had chosen. I and my daughter talked to her about her dress, about the decorations, a lot of things (Helena, 08/05/2013).*

While Helena's extract reveals that wedding preparations can now be shared at a distance, in a more interactive form, it also shows the continued importance of writing and sending wedding cards and significant gifts to mark the meaningfulness of a family member's wedding, as Patricia recalled doing in the 1990s. Moreover, while up to the mid-2000s it was usual to ask the family members to send hard copy photos, or copies of the video recording, which was a form of material 'proof' of their connection, from the mid-2000s onwards, some participants observed that the 'post-ritual' practice of sending hard copy wedding photos ended, and the photos and videos were instead sent by e-mail and later shared by posting on Facebook<sup>36</sup>. One of the participants, Selma, said that she had stored her brother's wedding photos and created an album of them online, as a way of virtually creating 'proof' that she had valued this family time.

While some of the Brazilian migrant women were unable to celebrate their family member's actual wedding rituals, the importance of taking part in the family ritual was not diminished for them. In fact, they tried to engage in the preparation moments and in the post-rituals as a way of signifying that they were celebrating this special family time and that doing so was important for them to sense they were part of the family, even living far apart. I now turn to how the Brazilian migrant women and their family members recalled celebrating the weddings held in the UK.

### ***Brazilian migrants' weddings in the UK***

The literature on transnational marriage tends to give special attention to weddings held in the home countries. Although weddings in the country of origin are considered preferable and/or more emotional (Olwig, 2002; Mand, 2002), in this research some of the Brazilian migrant women described having their weddings in the UK<sup>37</sup>. None of these participants had religious celebrations in the UK; they

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<sup>36</sup> Once again it should be highlighted that when the fieldwork of this research was carried out the participants were not yet using WhatsApp.

<sup>37</sup> In the case of marriage in the UK, this study encountered three participants who reported getting married as a strategy, not to migrate to the UK, but to acquire permanent residency. It is important

had a ceremony in a registry office and then a reception. Three main reasons were mentioned by the Brazilian migrant women for holding their weddings in the UK. The first concerned financial issues: *'it would be too expensive to get married in Brazil, because there I would have to invite many people'* (Carla, 38 years old, living in the UK since 2000). The second was to do with the partner's preference for a small celebration or family location: *'my husband is British, his family is here, we were going to live here, so we felt we should get married here'* (Helena, 45 years old, living in the UK since 1991). The third reason for getting married and having their wedding in the UK instead of Brazil was mainly due to migration status:

*[...] after the wedding I sent my passport to the Home Office to get a permanent visa. If we had got married in Brazil, I would have had to ask for a wife's visa there, and then come here. It is a lot of bureaucracy. When we got married we did something simple to celebrate it and that was it.* (Elsa, 54 years old, living in the UK since 1998, 25/11/2013).

The Brazilian migrant women who had their weddings in the UK all got married before the incorporation of Skype into their communication with their family members in Brazil. Thus, their interaction with their family members in Brazil during the preparation stage was mainly through telephone calls, which they said strongly featured negotiating the attendance of family members from Brazil. This involved changes of dates, arrangements for accommodation, migration border explanations, and debates over the price of flight tickets. As Carla explained:

*My mother had never come to the UK; the first time was to my wedding, so I had to arrange a date that she could be here, and we had to write her a letter to her pass through immigration, she does not speak English, ... and I bought her flight tickets, so we talked a lot to arrange all these things, and it was very nice that she came'* (13/06/2013).

Regarding the invitations to the weddings in the UK, the Brazilian migrant women said that they just invited very 'close' family members from Brazil. Carla, who got married in the UK where she had met her German husband, recalled that

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to say that this happened for two of the participants at the beginning of the 1990s, and for one in the early 2000s. Two of them married British citizens, and one married a Brazilian with Italian citizenship. All of the marriages were acts of friendship; they did not involve charging any money. The marriages did not include any celebrations, and in fact were hidden for several years from the families in Brazil as the migrants reported some shame about engaging in marriage with the clear purpose of changing their migration status.



she invited to her wedding *'just a few very close family members from Brazil'* (Carla, 13/06/2013). Like Carla, Patricia (41 years old, living in the UK since 1995) who married a British man, only invited a few family members from Brazil to her wedding in the UK and did not send formal invitations, such as wedding cards. She said she had just called her immediate family members, her mother, father and siblings, to sort out a date that would suit them, in order for them to be able to attend, and then sent e-mails to aunts, uncles and cousins. While the weddings held in Brazil had both the nuclear and extended family members attending, the Brazilian migrant women whose weddings were held in the UK often only mentioned their mother's attendance. It was common to hear: *'I got married here and only my mother came'*.

Carla stressed the importance of her mother being present on her actual wedding day and lamented her siblings' absence. She commented:

*It was fantastic that at least my mother came. It was the first time she had come. I had lived here for many years and she had never come. My siblings have never come, even for my wedding. It was a pity, but we talked that week, and they kept reminding us to take photos to send to them. It was very nice to have my mother here with me, helping with the preparations and on the day. It was important to have someone from my side, from my family. (Carla, 13/06/2013)*

When asked about her father's absence, she responded:

*I would not have expected him to come. For a long time, we did not speak. He and my mother are divorced. Now, I talk to him, now we get along, but I would not have expected him to come. But I would have been very disappointed if my mother had not come. It would have been weird to get married without anyone from my family. I was happy that at least my mother was here. (Carla, 13/06/2013).*

While in Carla's case her father's absence was expected, as their relationship had suffered due to her parents' divorce; in Fatima's case, by contrast, her father's absence was explained with some sadness and even guilt, because of her decision to live a long way away. She clearly had expectations of her father's attendance at her wedding in the UK.

*He did not come. He did not like to travel. He did not come. I would have liked him to come. He could have come. This is the price you pay for living far away. My mother came two months before I got married*

*and it was very good to have her with me, I was very glad to have her, but he could have come as well. Like my brother, he could have come. My sister I understand, she was going through a difficult time in her life, financially and emotionally (Fatima, 03/06/2013).*

As Hage (2003, cited in Baldassar et al., 2007:151) argues ‘sometimes the greatest gift we can give someone we love is the gift of our presence, of simply “being there”’. The absence of significant family members from Brazil at their wedding in the UK was explained by the migrant women, using both ‘legitimate’ and ‘non-legitimate’ reasons, to use Finch’s notion of negotiating family relationships (1989). The ‘legitimate reasons’ were ones that involved macro and meso factors, a term used by Baldassar et al. (2007) and Merla (2014) to explain the difficulties of migrants in interacting with their family members. These factors included the high price of flight tickets, health conditions, the difficulty of leaving children in Brazil (mainly affecting siblings), and employers’ leave arrangements. Those were ‘legitimate excuses’ allowed for siblings and ‘close’ extended family (such as aunts, uncles and cousins). Besides these, which were more or less comprehensive reasons, there were micro factors, such as family conflicts and personal emotions. This was the case with Carla’s difficult relationship with her father and Fatima’s father’s fear of travelling. These were ‘legitimate excuses’ allowed for fathers, but for mothers I noted that there were no ‘legitimate excuses’ for their absence, apart from very serious health problems, as was the case for one interviewee. The mother’s presence was very much expected, and valued, and usually they acted as the representative of the whole family. The participants’ accounts suggested that only their mothers were capable of this role, as Carla commented:

*I felt sad because my siblings were not at my wedding, but my mother represented them all. There was no better person to do it. (Carla, 13/06/2013).*

While only the mothers of the Brazilian migrant women were reported as taking part in the actual wedding held in the UK, on their partner’s family’s side, relatives from other localities, such as parents and siblings from Germany and Poland, and British or British-Indian relatives from areas other than London attended the weddings. Therefore, the actual wedding day had different features

from the ones held in Brazil. Carla considered that her wedding followed a ‘*more German way*’, than a Brazilian way of celebrating marriage. She explained:

*It was a small ceremony, just my husband’s parents, siblings, my mother and a few friends attended the wedding. It was not like those Brazilian ostentatious parties with all those things, no church, no big party. More like the German way. (Carla, 13/06/2013).*

Another participant, Fatima, who got married in the UK in 2000, recalled her wedding day. She explained:

*My husband’s family is from Goa, so I wore a red sari. I liked that I did not wear a white dress like brides do in Brazil. We did not marry in a church; we went to a registry office to marry. His family was there. On my side, only my mother came. (Fatima, 03/06/2013).*

Patricia, a 41-year-old living in the UK since 1995, who married a British citizen, explained about her wedding reception which was in her mother-in-law’s back garden. She described how the food was prepared in a ‘British way’, and mainly organized by her mother-in-law. However, she recalled that when her mother arrived a few days before the wedding, they decided that they would cook at least one Brazilian dish. They then decided that they would cook desserts. She explained:

*I made brigadeiro and beijinho<sup>38</sup>. I know they are not traditional wedding sweets in Brazil, but they [the British] did not know that, and they are food that reminds me of Brazil, so I asked my mother to make them. It was nice, because we cooked them a day in advance, and as we were rolling them, we spent hours talking remembering happy times we had in Brazil. (Patricia, 06/06/2013)*

Patricia’s quote shows that it was important for her to include on her wedding day some traditional elements to provide memories of significant family events in Brazil. Thus, by cooking sweets for her wedding day that were ‘traditional’ at Brazilian children’s birthday parties, Patricia resignified her family memories of childhood birthday parties, and by bringing family childhood

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<sup>38</sup> *Brigadeiro* and *Beijinho* are typical Brazilian birthday party sweets.

memories into her wedding in the UK, she emphasized her need to keep connected to her family 'roots'. In this sense, she made the Brazilian sweets she and her mother had made into significant symbols which worked to reinforce her connection to her family in Brazil.

As happened with the weddings held in Brazil, the weddings in the UK were photographed and filmed. This practice was extremely important for these weddings, as it provided material elements to share with the family members in Brazil. All the Brazilian migrant women who got married in the UK said that their 'post-ritual' elements were done by their mothers, who took a number of photos with them, and a few of the participants noted that their mother even took a copy of the video-recording to Brazil. As Antonia, Patricia's mother (65 years old, living in Brazil) explained:

*I visited her a few times, one was for her wedding, my husband could not go, but I went. And I returned full of pictures. She asked a cousin of her husband to be responsible for taking the photos, because I had to take them with me (laughs). I remember that I arranged a day, soon after I returned, and I invited a few people, close family, you know, to watch the video and see the photos. (Antonia, 08/07/2014).*

In summary, the Brazilian migrant women who got married in the UK recalled that their marriage was an important moment in their life, which they shared with their family members in Brazil. They mentioned sharing the preparation stage through telephone calls, in which they negotiated the attendance of their family members from Brazil. They also noted that it was mainly their mothers who attended their actual wedding day, and they explained why some of their family members could not attend, giving 'legitimate' or 'less legitimate' reasons. However, their partner's family members had attended the wedding. The celebration was important for them to signify their 'new' family unit as well as reinforcing their ties with their family members in Brazil.

As the focus of this research was to understand the Brazilian migrant women's interaction with their Brazilian family members, the relationships between them and their partner, and their partner's family members was beyond the scope of this research, but I recognized it was an important element in their own family formation, and a point to be further explored in research about Brazilian transnational families. Finally, the weddings held in the UK, as well as the ones in Brazil, were photographed and recorded, constituting the post-ritual element, and

giving ‘proof’ of their family connection, which was mentioned as contributing to their family history.

**Table 6.1 Summarizing the main forms and features of celebrating marriages**

The Brazilian migrants' weddings in Brazil	Features/ Arrangements	Content		Participants gender and age	Capacity/ opportunity	Symbolic and affective meanings
	Demand a lot of organization, predefined arrangement and negotiation	<p><b>In the 1990s and early 2000s</b></p> <p><b>Telephone calls and emails to discuss preparations:</b> location, guest list, reception place, invitation cards</p> <p><b>Visiting actual wedding:</b> Religious or non-religious, nuclear and extended family guests</p>	<p><b>Gifts:</b> helping to pay for the party, or money gifts</p> <p><b>Post-wedding:</b> Telling stories Looking at material memories (Photos and video-recordings)</p>	<p>Siblings and parents: telephone calls and e-mails exchanged</p> <p>Nuclear and extended family attendance</p>	<p><b>Facilities/Barriers</b></p> <p>High cost of weddings</p> <p>High level of negotiation with the family in Brazil</p> <p>Migration status restrictions</p>	<p>Highly desired</p> <p>Sense of rightness</p> <p>Sense of togetherness</p> <p>Reassuring family ties</p> <p>Sense of accomplishing a life-course stage</p>
Family members' weddings in Brazil	Need for planning and coordination in advance to secure attendance	<p><b>In the 1990s and 2000s</b></p> <p><b>Telephone calls</b> to be informed of wedding developments: location, guest list, decorations.</p> <p>Sending of congratulations cards and gifts</p> <p><b>Post-wedding:</b> Photos (hard copy and e-mail) and video recordings</p>	<p><b>From the mid-2000s onwards</b></p> <p><b>Websites and Skype</b> Sharing of wedding preparations. Seeing the location, decorations, dresses</p> <p><b>Post-wedding:</b> Posting photos on Facebook and video-recordings</p>	Siblings nieces and cousins	<p><b>Facilities/Barriers</b></p> <p>High cost of flight tickets</p> <p>Migrant children's ages; Employers' leave arrangements</p>	<p>Highly desired interaction</p> <p>Sense of rightness</p> <p>Sense of togetherness</p> <p>Reassuring family ties</p>
The Brazilian migrants' weddings in the UK	Demanding organization to secure attendance of Brazilian family members; Less rigid in following	<b>Late 1990s and mid-2000s</b>		<p>Mother's attendance</p> <p>Siblings' telephone calls</p>	<p><b>Facilities/Barriers</b></p> <p>Lower cost wedding; High negotiation with family members in Brazil and in the UK;</p>	<p>Sense of accomplishing a life-course stage</p> <p>Sense of resentment towards family</p>

	Brazilian traditional rites; More mixing of intercultural influences	<b>Telephone calls and e-mails to discuss preparations</b> family attendance, dates, accommodation, migration border explanations, flight tickets	<b>Actual wedding:</b> Intercultural influences; mother helping with the food <b>Post-wedding</b> Photos (hard copy and by e-mail) and video-recordings		High cost of flight tickets and accommodation; Siblings' child care; Siblings' employers' leave arrangement	members not attending
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Source: Self-elaboration

## 2. Birth of a child as a family ritual

As with marriages, the birth of a child has been historically and culturally constructed as a life-cycle moment, which involves ritualized practices. According to Cheal (2002) and Gillis (1996) the birth of a child became a 'special' family time, which should be marked and celebrated as a significant moment in the constitution of family, from the end of the nineteenth century onwards (Cheal, 2002 and Gillis, 1996). According to Gillis (1996:168), when the death of children and mothers in childbirth diminished, births became a less dreadful experience and 'anticipated with joy rather than dread'. This author states that in more recent years, in Western societies the process of 'hospitalization' and 'medicalization' which surrounds the birth of a child has meant that the actual birth is not usually at home, or in the presence of family members, as it was up to the middle of the twentieth century. However, it is still a moment that largely involves family members and which is marked as a family moment. In Brazil, the birth of a child, in recent years, usually occurs in a hospital, but it is still highly regarded as a family ritual, which is expected to be practised with family members.

As Imber-Black and Roberts (1998) have argued, besides being a meaningful moment that adult-children become parents, it is also a moment when parents turn into grandparents, and siblings into uncles and aunts. In addition, the birth of a child involves a number of family expectations and negotiations, which are usually explained by the distinct features of three stages: the preparation, the actual birth of the baby and the post-birth. The Brazilian migrant women of this study reported they shared these stages with their family members in Brazil, to

different degrees. The birth of their own children as well as the birth of their siblings' children were noted by the Brazilian migrant women as family times, which they shared with their family members in Brazil, and were considered by them as important for the constitution of their sense of familyhood. I describe these in the following sections.

### ***The Brazilian migrant women's birth ritual***

In this research, eight of the Brazilian migrant women interviewed had their children in the UK; four do not have children, one had her child in Brazil before migrating, one experienced having children both in Brazil and in the UK, one had children in the UK and in Portugal, and one was pregnant at the time of her interview. They recalled that their preparation stage began with their announcing their pregnancy to their partner and to their family members in Brazil via a telephone call. This telephone call was recounted as a meaningful moment, not necessarily a positive one, but significant for their sense of familyhood with their family members in Brazil. Most of the Brazilian migrant women interviewed, who were married or lived with a partner, had a positive experience of telling their families in Brazil about their pregnancy. One Brazilian migrant woman, who was not married or with a partner, said that the announcement of her pregnancy to her family in Brazil was an extremely difficult moment, which had deeply marked her.

In some cases, the women recalled that their announcement of the pregnancy was eagerly expected and celebrated by their family members in Brazil. Carla (38 years old, living in the UK since 2000) who was married and was trying to get pregnant at the time of our first conversation, commented: *'I talked to my mother the other day and she said: I cannot wait to start to see your belly grow, to buy my flight tickets'*. (Carla, 13/06/2013). Zilda also emphasized her family's expectations, as well as happiness, on her announcement: *'I remember that when I got pregnant the first thing I did was to tell my family in Brazil and they were very happy, and everybody wanted to talk and congratulate us'*. (Zilda, 23/07/2013). The congratulations and good wishes on the arrival of the baby also appeared in a letter sent by Zilda's niece to congratulate Zilda on her birthday and on the baby. In this letter her niece, who was a child, wrote:



Figure 6.1 Zilda's niece's letter

'From: Ana

To: Aunt Zilda

*Aunt Zilda, I wish you happiness. God bless you and your family for the rest of your life. I want also to congratulate you on your baby. I hope that on your birthday you can realize all your dreams.*

*God bless and care for you I wish you, Uncle Brian and your baby happiness.*

*Kisses and hugs'*

In contrast, Laura, who had her first child at the end of the 1980s, recalled her pregnancy announcement as traumatic. It was not welcomed by her family in Brazil, leaving her in a vulnerable state in the UK, and she momentarily broke off her interaction with her family members in Brazil. She explained that, unlike her brother, whose girlfriend got pregnant when they were in the UK, before Laura's migration, she did not receive her family's support, as the following extract reveals:

*I got pregnant and the father of my baby did not give me any support during the whole pregnancy period. So I was lost. I did not want to go back pregnant. But one day I got desperate and I called my mother to say that I was pregnant and I was planning to go back. Then, she said that she thought it would be better for me not to go back, to have my baby in London, because if I went back pregnant and without a husband, people would gossip about me and my child. (Laura, 21/07/2013).*



Laura's negative family reaction towards her unexpected pregnancy stopped her interactions with her family in Brazil during the first stage of her pregnancy and she reported feeling extremely lonely without her family support. Laura noted that she felt disconnected from her family at this time for two reasons: the lack of support from her mother on her announcement, and the communication difficulties and expense in the late 1980s. Laura believed that the difficulties in communication made this family conflict last longer than it would have lasted if she'd had the same access to the technologies of today. Moreover, she explained that this 'break' in interaction lasted for a couple of months. She slowly started to interact again with her family in Brazil, but she recalled that the conflict and her resentment only ended when her parents came to visit her and her son after the birth:

*I spent my entire pregnancy learning everything for myself. I bought books, at that time there was no Internet, and I did not have anyone like a mother, older sister, or aunt to tell me what to do. And at that time it was so difficult to manage conflict over a distance, because you did not have time to explain things in detail, by telephone, and in letters you wrote one thing, but when the letter got there, other things had happened. So, if it was today, my family and I would not have taken so long to be ok. We only got 100% ok when my parents came to visit me and my son, after his birth. (Laura, 21/07/2013).*

During the preparation stage, the Brazilian migrant women who had their children in the late 1990s and early 2000s said that they had increased their interaction with their Brazilian family members by calling their mothers more and even their sisters, particularly the ones who already had a baby. They recalled mainly asking questions about pregnancy effects and new-born babies' needs, checking if what they were feeling was 'normal', and planning their parents' and sisters' visits to help with the new-born baby. In addition, they recalled writing letters and sending photos of them being pregnant to their families in Brazil, in order to share a visual cue of this preparation stage, which later served as material 'proof' of their connection during the pregnancy moment.

The Brazilian migrant women who got pregnant after the mid-2000s explained that their preparation stage was shared with the family members in Brazil via webcam communication by Skype. They recalled using Skype with their parents and siblings to allow them to keep up with their pregnancy's developments. In addition, these women said that by doing their preparation stage by Skype, they

could share with their family members in Brazil some elements that for them marked the preparation stage of the birth such as the baby clothes, gifts received and the baby's bedroom decorations. While, in the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s, they could only share their preparation stage through describing it in telephone calls, letters and photos, from the mid-2000s they could share more visual cues of distinguishing elements.

As happened with the weddings of the Brazilian migrant women held in the UK, for the actual birth and the post-birth moment, the migrant women who had children in the UK recalled that their mother's presence during these two stages was very much expected. While the literature on the transnational family has usually reported the role of grandmothers in caring for 'left behind' children (Settles et al., 2009; Wall and José, 2004), less attention has been given to grandmothers who have travelled to other countries to engage in the moment of birth and post-birth of their daughters. Some of the Brazilian migrant women reported paying for their mother's flight ticket to the UK. Others mentioned the importance of arranging a special room in their house, usually the living room, or the baby room, to accommodate their mother, as they would be staying in the UK for several months after the birth of the baby. During follow-up conversations with Carla I went to her house when she was organizing her living room for her mother. I wrote in my fieldwork diary:

*Today I went to Carla's house, and she told me she was pregnant and she was organizing her living room in order for her mother to stay there. She said they were planning her mother's trip to the UK to arrive a few days before her labour, to help with things during the day, and stay longer after the birth of the baby. (field diary, 18/07/2013).*

Overall, the Brazilian migrant women who had their children in the UK affirmed that they wanted to have their mothers with them for a few days before the actual labour, and then in the following months. They considered the post-birth as the most important time to have their mother with them, and the end of the post-birth period varied among the participants from fifteen days up to one year, and it was usually marked by their mother (or other family member) returning to Brazil. Similar to Baldassar et al.'s (2007) findings about Italian migrants in Australia, the Brazilian migrant daughters and parents tended to assume that the presence of their parents, mainly the mothers, would be needed, anticipated and accepted during the actual birth and the post-birth period. In Brazil, it is common to hear it said: *'the*

*grandmother is a natural substitute for the mother*, *'she is the second mother'* (Mainetti and Wanderbroocke, 2013). Zilda's statement illustrates this assumption well:

*You know, my mother came because mothers have this thing, that when their daughters have a baby the mother has to help. (Zilda, 23/07/2013).*

The Brazilian migrant women recalled their mothers' arrival for the birth as a 'special' moment marked by the giving of family gifts for the new baby, especially clothes or small accessories, which their mother was giving to the baby, but also gifts sent by the migrants' siblings, aunts and cousins. The Brazilian migrant's mother's presence was mentioned by them as being essential to cope with the actual labour and afterwards, and minimize the transition to becoming a mother. Flavia commented on her mother's attendance:

*For my first baby I told my mother to come only after my daughter had been born, because she could stay three months with me, you know, at the time she came as a tourist. It was a huge mistake, I thought I would be fine, and that the worst part would be after the labour, but my delivery was very traumatic, I nearly died, I could not have a natural labour, but they did not care, that woman forced me. It was horrible. So when I became pregnant again with my second child, my mother was here before the labour, during the birth and after it. By that time she had acquired an Italian passport, so she stayed for six months after the birth. Then, she also came when my third child was born. She stayed for eight months. (Flavia, 31/05/2013)*

Indeed, the support of the Brazilian migrants' mothers at the actual birth and post-birth were considered essential for the wellbeing of their daughters and grandchildren. Grandmothers were seen as those who had experience of giving birth and taking care of new-born children, as they had done it before. Their presence at the birth of the first baby was considered central, because they could *'pass on their wisdom'* to their daughters, and help them to learn how to bath the baby, change the nappy, feed them, etc. They supported them until they had recovered from the labour and were able to care for the baby by themselves. Then, the grandmother could leave, as their daughter had completed her transition to become a mother. Nonetheless, the grandmother's presence was still extremely valued and expected with regard to the birth of the second or third child. Thus, being present at the birth ritual was not only to *'pass on their wisdom'*, but to share family time, which had

to be lived fully every time it happened. As the following words of Beatriz, Zilda's mother, reveal:

*They live far away, we cannot be with them all the time, and I cannot start doing something different for the time of their birth, so what I did for one I did for the others. I wouldn't have gone if I had been ill, but I was fine, so I went. We cannot do it differently just because they are far away or because it was the second or the third. (Beatriz, 06/12/2014)*

Nevertheless, some Brazilian migrant women, who had children in the UK, recalled that their mothers could not be with them on the birth day and/or post-birth. In these cases, other family members, especially sisters, played the role expected of their mothers. As Finch (1989) puts it, the family commitments are not fixed, in fact, they are subject to constant (re)negotiations. Some of the migrant women reported that their mothers could not attend their grandchildren's actual birth due to health or work situations. In only one of these cases the mother did not even come for the post-birth moment. In cases where the mothers could not attend, the siblings, usually the sisters, went to represent the family and help during the birth and post-birth.

Carla's case clearly illustrates family (re)negotiation of commitments for the birth day and post-birth. As previously mentioned, Carla was pregnant at the time of our first interview, and she was very much expecting her mother's presence at the birth and for the post-birth. However, two months before Carla gave birth, her mother suddenly passed away in Brazil. It completely destabilized Carla's birth plans. On visiting her after her mother's death, a few days before the birth of the baby, she showed me how she was struggling to organize the baby's room, and prepare her things to go to the maternity ward. As she entered the baby's room, she started to cry, being desolated by her mother's absence. In order to try and minimize her pain, her sister and her mother's sister decided they would travel to the UK to be with her on her birth day and for the post-birth. I wrote in my fieldwork diary:

*Carla was devastated, and she told me she has no strength to organize the baby room alone, every time she holds something she cries... cries, so she was waiting for her sister and aunt to come and help her. (field diary, 29/01/2014)*

Although she valued her sister and aunt taking the role expected to be filled by her mother, and she mentioned how meaningful it was for her to feel she was

still part of her family in Brazil, the new arrangements still lacked the complete sense of the way things should be. Having the mother's presence at the birth or post-birth for Brazilians is a kind of 'tradition' (historically and culturally constructed), which reinforces their sense of familyhood. Not having her mother with her, she reinforced this sense of family by highlighting her aunt's and sister's presence. As Carla told me and I wrote in my fieldwork diary:

*She was glad that her sister and aunt were coming, but they cannot stay like her mother would stay, they will come for 15 days maximum. Her mother would stay at least 3 months. But she was glad they were coming (field diary, 29/01/2014)*

In addition to having their mother present at the birth and post-birth moment, the Brazilian migrant women revealed a strong need to share the post-birth with their family members who had stayed in Brazil. The women who had their babies before the 2000s recalled that as soon as the baby was born their mothers usually called Brazilian family members, such as her father and siblings to give them the news that the mother and baby were well. They also recalled that they sent photos of their new-born baby to their family members in Brazil. The Brazilian migrant women who had their babies after the mid-2000s recalled that in their post-birth period they sent photos by e-mail, and/or posted them on Facebook as a way of presenting the new-born baby to their Brazilian family. They also mentioned going online on Skype to show the baby's development and somehow introduce the fact that the new-born baby was a member of her Brazilian family.

Besides sharing their own birth stages (preparation, actual birth and post-birth) with their Brazilian family members, the migrant women of this research stressed the importance of also being involved in the birth of their siblings' babies in Brazil.

### ***The birth of siblings' babies***

While none of the Brazilian migrant women in this study were physically present in Brazil for the actual birth of their nephews or nieces, they still recognized the birth moments (preparation, actual birth day and post-birth) as being important to their sense of familyhood constituted from a distance. They mentioned their involvement in the preparation stage, highlighting that they remembered their

siblings' announcement of pregnancy during a telephone call and their involvement during the entire pregnancy period of their sisters or sisters-in-law. This period was marked by an increase in communication, the sending of gifts, buying technology items, and even resolving family conflicts. Carla commented on how she had resolved a family conflict regarding her sister's pregnancy, from a distance:

*She got pregnant and my father did not want to give her a house he used to rent. I remember when I found out about it, I was furious. I called him and said: 'Look, you do not need that house, my brother does not need it and I do not need it, but she and the baby will need it, so ask the tenant to move out'. He did. My call had a strong effect on him. So, next month my sister was in the house. (Carla, 13/06/2013).*

Another participant, Fatima, recalled how during her sister's pregnancy she felt the need to engage more intensely in communication with her sister and that this period was also marked by the sending of gifts to the baby. She explained how she tried to compensate for her absence by constantly sending gifts for the baby to come:

*I sent her many gifts. Every time I saw something that reminded me of my niece I bought it and sent it. I wanted my sister to know I was thinking about her and her baby (Fatima, 03/06/2013)*

The practice of sending gifts, as a way of compensating for absence in transnational families is usually reported in the relationship between migrant mothers and left-behind children (Madianou and Miller, 2012; Parreñas, 2005). The Brazilian migrant women's narratives of this study expand the idea of sending gifts as a compensatory practice beyond just the dyadic relationship of parents and children. In fact, siblings also valued this practice to make up for their absence and it was reported as being particularly important to them to signify their interaction on the birth of their siblings' babies.

Besides sending gifts in the preparation stage of the birth, the Brazilian migrant women said that their siblings would also ask them to buy various baby items, from technological equipment to clothes. The technological items in some cases were not available in Brazil, or were much cheaper in countries of the so-called 'developed world', such as the UK. The items that the siblings requested included baby monitor cameras, baby gyms and play mats, clothes, high chairs and

toys. The Brazilian migrant women reported that the arrival of these items in Brazil was usually expected on their first visit after the baby was born, which was hoped to be before the baby was one year old. But they recalled that those items could also be sent via a Brazilian friend who travelled to Brazil before them, or by post, which was their last option, because of the price. To engage in this ‘giving of things’, especially ‘modern’ and ‘high technology’ items, was described by the participants as a way of minimizing their absence, and taking part in the preparation stage of the birth. They considered it valuable for them and it had symbolic and affective significance, communicating the importance of participating in the birth moment of their nieces and nephews.

Regarding the actual birth day, the Brazilian migrant women whose siblings had a baby in the 1990s recalled that they could not interact on the exact day, as they only knew that the baby was born once they had called their family members in Brazil. Nonetheless, Fernanda, a 39-year-old living in the UK since 1999, whose brother had a baby in Brazil in 2010, recalled how she had actively taken part in her brother’s child’s birth day. Her brother had sent her a link provided by the maternity unit with photos and videos of the new-born baby in the nursery. It was called the virtual nursery, where she could see her nephew online. She commented on how it allowed her to engage more closely with her family members in Brazil during this important time:

*When my first nephew was born, all my family were extremely anxious. My brother sent me a link called ‘virtual nursery’. Through this link, I was able to see my nephew for the first time. Actually, I saw his face before my mother did. I called my mother and said I’d already seen him. She asked how, as I was so far away. I then explained about this virtual nursery. (Fernanda, 02/08/2013).*

During the post-birth period, which in the case of the siblings’ children in Brazil was marked by the six months’ maternity leave, a period in which the siblings received constant help from their mother, the Brazilian migrant women of this research commented that they had intensified their interaction with their siblings in Brazil in order to interact with the baby, and signify their role as an aunt. The participants whose siblings had children in the 1990s said that they asked for photos of the new-born babies, and they showed me that they had those photos, which had

served as ‘proof’ of their connection to their family in Brazil on the birth event of their nephews and nieces. The participants whose siblings had children from the mid-2000s onwards recalled that they went on Skype to see the new-born baby and to interact with their siblings, and they also received photos by e-mail and later Facebook. In addition, some of the Brazilian migrant women had visited their siblings and the new-born babies to interact in the post-birth. Zilda and Carla commented:

*My sister used to send me pictures of her children from when they were babies, then she used to do a mark on the wall, and take pictures of them growing up and send them to me. I have them all. (Zilda, 23/07/2013).*

*When my niece was born my sister sent me pictures on my e-mail. I made an album with all my niece’s pictures. When my niece was two or three months I visited her. (Carla, 13/06/2013).*

To sum up, the Brazilian migrant women recalled that the birth of their children, as well as the births of their nephews and nieces were ‘special’ family times, which they recognized as important to share with their family members in Brazil. The ritualistic features which distinguished the births were in their sharing of the preparation stage, the actual birth and post-birth periods. The features of the preparation moment were the announcement of the pregnancy (whether it was positively or negatively received), the exchanging of gifts, telephone calls asking for information about the pregnancy and baby issues, and the arrangements for their mother’s visit. The actual birth and post-birth moments, in the case of the Brazilian migrant women’s children were marked by their mother’s presence and the sending of photos (hard copy or by e-mail and Facebook) and talking on Skype to show the baby to their family members in Brazil. It was a way of introducing the baby and allowing their family members in Brazil to ‘welcome’ the new family member. The actual birth and post-birth periods of the migrant women’s nieces and nephews were marked by talking on the phone and sending printed photos in the 1990s and, from the mid-2000s, with the online virtual nursery, talking on Skype and sending photos by e-mail and later Facebook, as well as some visiting the siblings and the new-born baby, as a way of marking the occasion of becoming an aunt. All these elements were distinguishing features noted by the participants of this research to



mark that they were celebrating the birth of a family member from a distance, which was considered vital to the constitution and reconstitution of their sense of familyhood. In the next section I turn to the last of the family rituals in the life-course – funerals.

**Table 6.2: Summarizing the main forms and features of births moments**

The birth of Brazilian migrants' children in the UK	Features/ Arrangements	Content		Participants Gender and age	Capacity/ opportunity	Symbolic and affective meanings
	Need for organization and pre-arrangements, and increased interaction during the pregnancy and soon after the baby's birth	<b>Late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s</b>	<b>After the mid-2000s</b>	<p><b>Preparation:</b> Talking with mothers and sisters who'd had babies</p> <p><b>Actual birth:</b> Only mothers</p> <p><b>Post birth:</b> Mothers sisters and aunt (in exceptional case)</p>	<p><b>Facilities/Barriers</b></p> <p>Paying for mother's flight ticket</p> <p>Accommodation arrangements</p> <p>Visitor visa time restrictions</p> <p>Long period of absence from Brazil</p> <p>Difficulty interacting with daughter's host society (not able to speak local language)</p>	<p>Sense of expectation on mother's attendance</p> <p>Feeling of being 'protected' by mother's presence</p> <p>Family-negotiated commitment</p> <p>Grandparents' sense of obligation and desire to care for grandchildren</p> <p>Sense of introducing the new-born baby to the extended family</p>
The birth of siblings' children in Brazil	Need for organization and pre-arrangements, and increased interaction during pregnancy and soon after the baby's birth	<b>1990s and early 2000s</b>	<b>After the mid-2000s</b>	<p><b>Preparation:</b> Intense talking with siblings, Sending of gifts</p> <p><b>Actual birth:</b> Intense telephone calls and exchange of photos</p> <p><b>Post birth:</b> Visit to nieces or nephews</p>	<p><b>Facilities/Barriers</b></p> <p>High price of flight tickets at short notice</p> <p>Distance and long hours of flying</p> <p>Employers' leave arrangements</p>	<p>Resolving of conflict at a distance</p> <p>Sense of desire, guilt and sadness because of lacking physical presence</p> <p>Sense of togetherness by taking part in the birth stages</p> <p>Sense of becoming an aunt</p>

Source: Self-elaboration

### **3. The death of a loved one: the last farewell**

Talking about the death of a loved one is a painful process which people usually avoid, as it brings up feelings that are difficult to deal with. Most of the Brazilian migrant women I interviewed had faced the death of a loved one from a distance. Most of them had lost their fathers, and their grandparents. Only three had lost their mothers, and in these cases two of the participants' mothers had died during the research fieldwork, as I noted in Chapter 3. None of them had lost any siblings or children.

Similar to marriages and births, Cheal (2008) and Gillis (1996) argue that marking the death of a loved one as a 'special' family time, which involves ritualistic practices, has been historically and culturally constructed, mainly from the late nineteenth century. Previously, the death of a person was much more a matter for the community and religion. In Brazil, it is worth highlighting that until the mid-twentieth century, the ritualization of death was part of the daily life of cities and families, as the number of deaths was much larger and the life-expectancy was low. According to Isaia and Tomasi (2014), who describe the development of death rituals in Brazil, at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the majority of Brazil's population were in rural areas, such rites could take many hours or even days. The authors describe how it usually began with the sacrament provided by the priest to the deceased. Then the bells of the church would ring to announce the death; meanwhile the body was prepared at home by family members. The funeral was held at home, and it was a long rite, lasting about a day, and the whole community used to attend the funeral, at which meals were served on many occasions. After the funeral, the body was customarily taken to the nearest church or directly to the cemetery, with extensive processions, and celebrations in the church – such as the funeral mass.

However, according to these authors, the increase in industrialization, urbanization and hygienic medicalization and hospitalization processes in Brazil in the second half of the twentieth century has changed the rites of death. The increase in deaths at hospital and the emergence of funeral services, which removed the death rituals from the houses, made the funeral moment and mourning rituals the ways that the families created for themselves to reinforce their love and loyalty to the family. In fact, the death of a loved one became an unexpected moment, which

the family had to cope with together. Therefore, the need for a ‘special’ moment to express a family’s loss did not disappear by removing the death from the house, in fact, it is still considered to be a very important moment of family togetherness at the moment of family separation (Gillis, 1996).

As with marriages and births, the ‘life-cycle’ family ritual of the death of a loved one, according to Imber-Black and Roberts (1998), can be divided into three stages: the preparation, the actual funeral and the post-funeral. The Brazilian migrant women in this research described how they practised these stages, which, as I said, are not intrinsic to the life-cycle, but the Brazilian migrant women’s narration of it usually took into account these stages to describe how they faced their father’s or mother’s death, and marked it as a distinguished moment, as I show in the next section.

### ***The death of a father and/or mother in Brazil***

As with the birth of a child, the Brazilian migrant women who faced the death of a loved one noted that their preparation stage began with the announcement of the death of their father or mother. The delivery of the death news was in all cases communicated via a telephone call, which one of the Brazilian migrant women described as: *‘the worst telephone call I have received in my entire life’* (Zilda, 23/07/2013). Even though, nowadays, there are new technologies, such as e-mail, text messages and Skype, they were all considered by the participants of this research to be inappropriate to deliver the death news of a close family member. Even for those participants whose family member was ill and they had previously exchanged several text messages and had Skype conversations to check on their father’s or mother’s health, they were informed about the actual death through a telephone call. To receive such sad news by telephone was considered the most appropriate and sensitive way, representing the seriousness of the news, and it marked the beginning of the preparation stage of the ‘death moment’. As Juliana, a 46-year-old living in the UK since 1995, wrote in her diary:

*Friday (14/02/2014) My brother called to let me know my mother had passed away. She was ill and had been through surgery, we had talked on Skype many times, and I texted him constantly, but when I saw his call I knew it was the worst news (Juliana’s diary).*

As Gardner (2002) observed regarding transnational burial rituals carried out in London and Sylhet, receiving the news that a close family member – such as a father or mother – had died deeply affected the migrants emotionally. Zilda commented that since her father's sudden death, she feared every time the telephone rang at unexpected hours like late at night or too early in the morning. She said: *'It gives me goose bumps and my heart races'* (Zilda, 23/07/2013). The announcement of her father's death was related by her as an emotional moment that affected her not only at the time of the call, but left an emotional memory with her. She said:

*When my father died, the telephone rang at midnight; I knew it was not good news. It was the worst telephone call I have ever received in my entire life. When a telephone rings at late hours, it is never good news. My heart went pang. I was right, the news was that my father had had a heart attack and had died. Like that [she clicks her fingers]. From that moment onwards I knew how hard it was to be far away at these moments and how alone I felt (Zilda, 23/07/2013).*

The receiving of a telephone call at unsociable hours was considered by other participants to mark the announcement of death news of a family member. Laura commented on how she was told about her mother's death very early in the morning:

*My mother was taken into the hospital that day, and her condition was not good, so I knew that the bad news could arrive at any time. That night I did not fall asleep. I spent the night sitting on my bed, reading and thinking about her in my bedroom. At 7 o'clock, more or less, my telephone rang, I knew my mother had died. I was at home and then I went to tell my children about the bad news. It was a sad long day. (Laura, 21/07/2013).*

Laura and Zilda identified the timing of the telephone calls, very late or very early in the morning, as signaling that it was very serious and urgent news. In fact, they said it could only be *'bad news'* – death news, that they were about to receive. Everything else could be said during *'normal'* hours. Zilda recalled that as her father's death was sudden, that telephone call marked for her the beginning of the process of the death of her father. Laura, whose mother had had a long fight against cancer, had expected this call for a couple of years, every time her mother went into hospital. Laura especially emphasized her waiting and the hours of anxiety, when she could not fall asleep the last time her mother went into hospital. The ringing of

the telephone in the morning was the confirmation she had been waiting for the whole night, in fact, for the last couple of years, since her mother had been diagnosed with terminal cancer. Her mother had died. Instead of surprise and despair, like Zilda, Laura described how she felt extremely sad, and how at that point she and her mother could finally rest.

Regarding the giving of the 'death' news, unlike the other family rituals mentioned in this thesis, where the mothers and sisters were the main instigators, when it came to giving the news of a loved one's death, the Brazilian migrant women recalled that it was their siblings, particularly their brothers, who took the responsibility. Carla, who has a sister and a brother, recalled that it was her brother who called her to tell her about her mother's death. She recalled that if it had been her sister giving the news, she '*would have killed me too, she was too emotional*'. Zilda, who has three sisters (two younger than her and one older), and one brother, who is the eldest, also recalled that it was her brother who called her to say about her father's death.

*He called me because my mother could not do it. She was in shock. She was devastated. And I think my sisters were giving her support too. I talked to them later, but he was the one with the hard task of breaking the news to me. (Zilda, 23/07/2013).*

Besides disclosing the death news, the Brazilian migrant women said that it was their brothers who helped them to decide about whether or not to travel to attend the funeral. The decision and preparations for attending the funeral usually have to be made in a very short time. Thus, the migrants had to deal with the feelings of loss and in the meantime decide if they were going to attend the funeral of the family member. Taking part in the funeral in person was mentioned by the migrant women as being socially expected in Brazil, and those who were not able to attend their parent's funeral usually gave me their reasons for not attending.

### ***Capacity and opportunity to travel to the funeral in Brazil***

Once the death news had been received, the Brazilian migrant women noted that they were faced with the dilemma of whether or not to physically attend the funeral of their father or mother. During the fieldwork they had stressed the importance of

being in Brazil for their father or mother's funeral, and in fact one participant, Carla, said that she had even set up a savings account where she saved the money to be used for her attendance at the funeral of a close family member such as: *'my mother, father, siblings or my grandmother'*.

*My husband and I have a savings account in case of emergencies. If someone gets ill and dies I can go to the funeral. It is very important to me. I feel relieved to know we have these savings. (Carla, 13/06/2013, before her mother's death)*

Another participant, Lucia, also mentioned her father's funeral as a time when she would have wanted to go to Brazil to be with her family, but she outlined the difficulties of attending her father's funeral.

*I always knew I would not be able to attend my father's or mother's funeral. For example, my father died suddenly, and I knew I would not be able to go. Now, with my mother, if she dies like my father I know I will not go. I will not get there in time. (Lucia, 27/05/2013).*

The Brazilian migrant women who did not attend their father or mother's funeral, explained their absence by listing some reasons, with some degree of being 'more legitimate' or 'less-legitimate', to use Finch's (1989) terms. The 'more legitimate' reasons were the ones that they considered 'out of their control', or 'macro' and 'meso' difficulties that interfered with their capacity to go to Brazil on their mother or father's funeral day (Baldassar et al., 2007; Merla, 2014). This category of 'more legitimate' reasons included elements such as the distance, time spent and cost of travelling; employers' leave arrangements and children's school terms; and the speed of burials in Brazil. A recurring narrative among the participants gave a combination of these factors. Zilda and Laura, in their interviews, both highlighted these three factors as being central to their inability to attend their father's and mother's funerals. They said:

*When my father died, of course I looked on the Internet to find a flight to get to Brazil, but the prices were extremely high, and the flight combination would not allow me to get there before the funeral. (Zilda, 23/07/2013).*

*When they told me about my mother's death, I cried and cried and I knew I could not go to her funeral. How could I go? I had my job, which nobody could do for me. And I had to support my children alone. My children were in school time. Ok, their grandmother had died, so they could have time off school, but you do not go to Brazil to stay a week or three days. It is too expensive and too far away to go for a short period and they could not be away from school for a long period. And I could not leave my children here and go; they had nobody to care for them besides me. (Laura, 21/07/2013).*

Laura's account highlights some of the 'macro' and 'meso' difficulties that prevented her from attending her mother's funeral. Laura's account demonstrates how elements such as the inequality of the labour market, particularly for single mothers, who are usually more vulnerable financially (for more on this topic see Padilla, 2007), and how the school calendar and attendance regulations are based on national realities, disregarding transnational family lives, and can influence the ability to attend a funeral and be with family members in Brazil.

Another factor that the Brazilian migrant daughters mentioned as limiting their ability to attend their parent's funeral was the fast burial laws in Brazil. Unlike British law which, according to Gardner (2002:195), 'stipulates that post-mortems have to be carried out if death occurs unexpectedly and, in some cases, bodies are not returned for several months', Brazilian law dictates that the body of a deceased person must be buried or cremated within 24 hours of the death being attested by a doctor. Therefore, when a family member dies, usually close and extended family members start to hurry to organize the funeral and burial, which should occur within 24 hours maximum. Zilda recorded:

*I wish I could have gone, but I knew I would not arrive for the funeral in time to go through it with the family. In Brazil, I do not know why, but they bury the person so quickly, and if you ask to keep the body it is expensive to pay for the freezing and the medical procedures. In Brazil, it is the case that if someone dies early in the morning, they will be buried in the late afternoon, before 5pm, business hours of course. (Zilda, 23/07/2013)*

Besides these 'more legitimate' reasons, the Brazilian migrant women who did not attend their parent's funeral listed other reasons considered by them 'less socially acceptable', but which were still mentioned to justify their absence from their parent's funeral day. I identify these as '*emotional*' reasons, which comprise

individual motivations and feelings. Lucia stressed: *'I did not want to see my father like that, inside a coffin. That is a memory that I am pleased I do not have'* (27/05/2013). Another participant justified her absence by expressing her mother's wishes: *'my mother was the kind of woman who used to say: If you want to give me flowers, give them to me when I am alive, please do not come to put flowers on my coffin'* (Laura). I noted that these two reasons only appeared in their interviews after the 'macro' and 'meso' reasons had been given. They seemed to use them to conclude their narratives of the reasons which led to them not attending their mother's or father's funeral.

It seemed that bringing out these reasons in the first instance, as the main reasons, rather than secondary ones, would have put them in a position of being seen as 'uncaring' adult-children or suggesting that they did not value their mother or father's last farewell. The emotional reasons were not considered strong enough to justify their absence from a loved one's funeral. The Brazilian women's accounts reveal that it appeared more appropriate to list a range of 'macro' and 'meso' reasons, and then list the emotional ones, in order to confirm that they valued their family relationship, and that they were willing to share this moment with their family. After giving reasons for not attending their parent's funeral in Brazil, the women whose mother or father had died when they were in the UK explained that although they did not go to Brazil to the actual funeral, they had still found a way to take part in it at a distance.

### ***The funeral rituals practised by the Brazilian migrant women***

Only two participants of this study had managed to physically attend the funeral of their mother in Brazil. Both were the participants whose mothers had died during my fieldwork. Carla, whose mother died suddenly in 2013, explained that she managed to attend her mother's funeral because of exceptional circumstances; her uncle owned the funeral service company. I noted in my fieldwork Carla's words:

*In Brazil, everyone is buried within 24 hours of their death. In normal circumstances, I would not have made it to my mother's funeral, because, as I said, I lost my bag with my passport on the train, when I received the news of her death, so I had to call the Brazilian Consulate to get a new*



*one, and all the process of buying flight tickets. My parents-in-law lent us some money, so I just made it, because of them, and because my uncle was the owner of a funeral service place and arranged for the release of the body to wait for my arrival. I had a special situation; because usually they do not wait, they do not usually wait for anyone who comes from far away. (field diary, 29/01/2014).*

While Carla and Juliana (whose mother died in 2014) could go to Brazil and go through the whole actual ‘funeral ritual’ with their family members, from the wake to the burial, the other participants had to face the funeral day of their parents from a distance. Although they were at a distance, the Brazilian migrant women recalled that the funeral day of their parent was not a ‘normal day’ for them. In fact, they remembered it as an especially sad day. Laura, whose mother died at the end of the 1990s, classed her mother’s funeral day as *‘a strange long day, on which my kids did not go to school, I did not work, we went to a swimming pool, it was a very quiet day for me, when I thought all day about my mother’*.

Other participants tried to engage with ‘traditional’ funeral rites at a distance, or even created their own funeral rites. I identified three main features of engagement noted by the participants: 1) getting information about the funeral ritual being held in Brazil; 2) prayer and spiritual connection; and 3) getting visual cues. Zilda recalled that at the time of her father’s burial in Brazil, she and her husband got together to pray. She knew that at the time of her father’s burial, her family would be praying in Brazil, so by praying at that exact same moment, she said they would all be connected, having a *‘liminal-like’* moment (Turner, 1982:64). In this way she tried to follow some of the funeral rites that she knew would be happening in Brazil, as her quote discloses:

*Between my husband and I, we did our own ceremony for my father. We prayed together at the moment my father was being buried. We prayed together for him. (Zilda, 23/07/2013).*

Lucia had a vivid memory of the day of her father’s funeral. She recalled that when her father passed away, mobile phones already existed, so her sister called her during the wake to describe how their father looked in the coffin, the people who were present and the flowers. Thus, Lucia commented that during her father’s funeral day, she was constantly connected with her sister but, after the burial, she was devastated. So she did her own ‘funeral ritual’ for her father.

*I hadn't gone to my father's funeral, but I did my own farewell. I put on the music he liked to listen to; I found a photo of him, and then I displayed it in my living room. He loved music. My partner and my ex-husband were with me, comforting me. Then I turned on the music he liked very loudly and I sang and I cried and cried. I know I will probably do the same thing for my mother (Lucia, 27/05/2013).*

Finally, there was one participant, Fernanda, who reported going online, on a video camera at her grandfather's funeral. She explained how her brother had called her with the news of their grandfather's death, and asked her if she would like to have access to a web link from which she could watch the funeral online. She recalled her experience:

*It is a funeral service, so you go online. At first, it was good, because I could see friends and family, but there was no interaction, so it soon seemed to me very inappropriate, because it was not a happy moment to watch, and to share it online was completely weird. Everyone was sad, crying, and at the same time greeting people and I was on a screen on the computer that was focused mostly on the coffin. I spent a couple of minutes watching and then I turned it off. I felt - do not know how to describe it - but it did not seem right. (Fernanda, 02/08/2013).*

In summary, the Brazilian migrant women who did not attend their mother or father's funeral in Brazil still distinguished the funeral day as a different 'special' sad day, which marked their construction of a sense of familyhood at a distance. They recalled their parent's funeral day as a day when they tried to connect to their loved one and their family members in different ways, from a distance. The fact of being far from the actual funeral ritual in Brazil did not mean they had not celebrated it, in fact, they found various ways of engaging with the family members on the funeral day and creating their own way of coping with it. Nonetheless, some of the migrant women noted that although they engaged with some of the funeral rites and even created their own funeral rite on the funeral day, they still faced feelings of emptiness, strangeness and even unreality regarding the death of their mother or father. They reported feeling that their mourning and healing process was somehow incomplete. Thus they suggested that the post-funeral moment, which should allow the healing process, was for them put in suspension, and they could only close the death healing circle when they visited their family members in Brazil, as I describe in the next section.

***Post-funeral: the healing process***

*I think I had held in all my feelings, I think I put them aside, and I decided to live it only when I was with my family in Brazil (Zilda, 23/07/2013).*

The Brazilian migrant women who did not go to their father or mother's actual funeral in Brazil recalled that in the period post-funeral – which varied from participant to participant, but generally lasted until their first visit to Brazil after the death of their mother or father – their interaction with their family members in Brazil tended to increase. In doing this, they reported that during this period they wanted to somehow get involved in the mourning period, and help with the changes that the loved one's death had caused in the family. Some participants noted the need for family rearrangements, and negotiation with siblings, for example regarding the funeral expenses; accommodation for mothers who in some cases no longer wanted to live alone and went to live with their locally based children; financial help to pay for their mother's health insurance, and new accommodation arrangements during their visits.

While the post-funeral new arrangements were discussed at a distance, through telephone calls or Skype interaction, the participants said that they only realized properly about all the changes and could heal the pain of the loved one's death, when they went to Brazil for the first time after the death. Zilda explained how it was for her on realizing the implications of her father's death:

*I waited and went to Brazil with my husband and my children one year after my father's death. I thought I was strong and that I had coped well with my father's loss, but it was not the truth, I just realized it when the plane landed, when I thought: 'he will not be there at the gate', then, I started to cry, cry, cry. That was the moment I realized I was holding it all inside me, but when I stepped into Brazil, it all came out. I could not hold it anymore. (Zilda, 23/07/2013).*

She continued:

*Landing at the airport was the beginning of the process of really understanding his loss. When I arrived home, it was another shock, I saw all his stuff in his office. Actually, I had asked my mother not to change his office or give away any of his belongings before I arrived in Brazil, so she hadn't. I am very glad she did that, it helped me to cope. After I had seen everything, I asked my mother and siblings, my nephews and nieces – we were all sitting round the table – I asked them*

*to tell me how everything had happened. I had to hear it from them, so we all cried together, but that was finally the moment that I could pull all my feelings together. (Zilda, 23/07/2013).*

Laura also recorded that her first visit to Brazil after the death was an important part of the healing process for her and her children to close the death circle of her mother. But in contrast to Zilda's experience, Laura recalled that her first visit to Brazil did not minimize her feelings of emptiness. Laura, in fact, commented that her first visit to Brazil after her mother's death produced in her and her children a strong feeling of oddness and sadness, and even some sense of disconnectedness from their family. She noted that the dynamic of the family had changed completely as her mother had been the hub of their interactions. Although noting this feeling of disconnection, she also reported that her connection to her family in Brazil was redirected to her younger sister, who I also interviewed. They said:

*We arrived at the airport, and then we went to my parents' house. When my mother was alive she always welcomed us with a nice meal. She used to ask us what we wanted and then she cooked it for us. I remember that the day we arrived, there was nothing in the kitchen, no food, nothing, I had to go out and buy a meal for us, it was very striking, she had been the centre of the house, my father did not know how to do it. After a while he found another woman, we thought it was good, she is a good woman, my father needed someone. (Laura, 21/07/2013).*

*After my mother passed away, which was very difficult for us, we got closer, even more than before, so now when she comes she stays with me, at my house. (Fabiana, 28/07/2014).*

As noted in the extracts above, being at a distance and not going through the actual funeral day of their father or mother with the family members in Brazil caused some of Brazilian migrant women to fail to fully realize the loss of the loved one. In this sense, they recalled that they only realized the loss once they had perceived the actual physical absence of their father or mother at the airport and at home during their first visit to Brazil after the death. They commented that although they had been informed of the changes by telephone or Skype, the distance had allowed them to not fully realize that their family life in Brazil had suffered changes, and they had been left with the feeling that the dynamic of the family was almost the same as before. However, they realized that after their first visit to Brazil,

they could really understand the transformations that such a loss had created in the family dynamic.

Zilda, for example, said that her mother decided to move to live with one of her daughters locally, and in the case of Laura her father remarried and moved to another city. Thus, the Brazilian migrant women said that the death of their father or mother transformed some of their pre-death family practices. For example, the place and length of stay in Brazil during visits faced changes. They reflected that they could no longer stay in their childhood home, which for some was still referred to as '*my house*'. In fact, they now had to stay somewhere else, usually in their siblings' houses. So they said that they had lost that place of return, the reference point they had before moving to the UK.

Some of the Brazilian migrant women reported that these changes affected their interaction with their family members in Brazil. In some cases, they tried to engage in more visits, and transformed it through annual visits at birthdays and Christmas. For example, Fatima recounted that after her father's death in 2007, she decided she would call her mother every day, and she increased her visits to Brazil to an annual basis. In contrast, Laura commented that, after her mother's death, she and her children went less often to Brazil, but she increased her communication with her younger sister. I noted that the death of a loved one could lead to a rearrangement in some of the family dynamics, and although the Brazilian migrant women realized the changes, they also affirmed that they had re-established their links in order to keep their family continuity and to maintain the sense of familyhood with their family members in Brazil.

Thus, the Brazilian migrant women in this study stressed that the death of their father or mother was a special but sad family time, which signified their family constitution and reconstitution at a distance. They remembered how receiving the news of the death of their mother or father had marked for them the beginning of the death period. They distinguished this moment by recalling their reasons for not attending the funeral in Brazil and they highlighted how, on the funeral day, they had practised some cultural and historical funeral rites, such as praying or creating their own '*rites*', such as listening to music, to mark the day and to connect them to their deceased loved one and to their family members. They described the funeral

day as a kind of ‘transcendent’ moment of connection. But some of the Brazilian migrant women also stressed that being at a distance left them with a feeling of not fully acknowledging the death of their father or mother, as they had not been through the funeral day and mourning process with their family members. They said that they only ‘closed’ the death circle on their first visit to Brazil, a moment that they recalled as being important to them to comprehend their new family dynamic and reconnect and create new arrangements to continue their family ties.

**Table 6.3 Summarizing the main forms and features of taking part in funerals**

	<b>Features/ Arrangements</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Participants gender and age</b>	<b>Capacity/ opportunity</b>	<b>Symbolic and affective meanings</b>
The Brazilian migrant women facing the death of a loved one in Brazil	Need for fast organization	<p><b>Preparation</b></p> <p><b>Telephone call:</b></p> <p>News of the loved one’s death</p> <p>Taking the decision of whether to travel to the funeral</p> <p><b>Actual funeral:</b></p> <p>Attendance at the funeral in Brazil</p> <p>Non-attendance, but engaging in some funeral rituals at a distance (praying, Skype to see the funeral, music)</p> <p><b>Mourning and healing process</b></p> <p>Increase in communication with the family in Brazil</p> <p>Visit to Brazil after the loved one’s death</p>	<p>Brothers announce the loved one’s death</p> <p>Difference made by the mother’s and father’s death on the family dynamic</p>	<p><b>Facilities/Barriers to physical attendance</b></p> <p>High price of flight tickets at short notice</p> <p>Distance and long hours of flying</p> <p>Employers’ leave arrangements</p> <p>Children’s school dates</p> <p>Brazilian fast burial</p>	<p>Sense of obligation to physically attend</p> <p>Feelings of emptiness, strangeness, and unreality</p> <p>Feeling of guilt for not attending the funeral</p> <p>Feeling of only completing the process of mourning after travelling to Brazil following the loved one’s death</p> <p>Rearrangement of connections</p>

Source: Self-elaboration

### **Concluding remarks**

In this last empirical chapter, I discuss how the Brazilian migrant women and their family members did life-cycle rituals with their family members in Brazil. Cheal (2002) and Gillis (1996) argue that the life-cycle moments such as marriages, births and deaths have been historically, culturally and socially ritualized in different forms and for different purposes. It was in the late nineteenth century that in Western societies, according to these authors, these life-cycle moments gradually became framed as important family rituals. Consequently, they started to mark and become part of the life-course of families.

In the case of Brazil, this process started to take place mainly from the mid-twentieth century onwards, when the process of urbanization, industrialization and the mass arrival of European migrants made these moments special family times, not only celebrated by the elite families, but also spread across the different levels of Brazilian society. These life-cycle moments, then, became important family times, which had to be done with family members. Like the other family rituals reported in this thesis, these ones have not been shown as having intrinsic features (Bell, 1992). Although they comprised some expected 'ways of acting' which were usually in three distinct stages (echoing the classical work of Van Gennep (1965 [1909]) and Turner (1969), I have shown that these were not rigid intrinsic features of family rituals. They were understood as 'strategic to differentiation' (as Bell, 1992:90 argues), so it does not mean that these stages could not be negotiated. Moreover, if one of the stages was not practised, the family ritual was still meaningful to the families studied here.

Regarding 'weddings' as a family ritual, the Brazilian migrant women recalled how they had celebrated their marriages, in Brazil and the UK. In addition, they celebrated the marriages of their significant family members, mainly siblings. They recalled that they shared the preparation stage of their own weddings held in Brazil and in the UK with their family members in Brazil, and also the preparation of their siblings' weddings. They distinguished the wedding preparation moment as a period when they increased their communication with their family members and usually negotiated elements of their wedding such as: deciding whether to have a religious wedding or not, setting up the wedding location, negotiating the list of

guests, choosing the wedding invitations, the reception, accommodation, flight tickets, the food, the decorations, clothing, etc.

The Brazilian migrant women described how their actual wedding day was and their family's engagement in it. They also described their engagement in their siblings' weddings. The weddings held in Brazil were reported as being celebrated with nuclear and extended family members, while the weddings held in the UK only had their mother's attendance and their partner's family. The Brazilian women assigned to their mother's attendance a strong affective meaning, as a person able to represent their entire family. Finally, weddings were recorded by them as symbolic and affective family times, which produced 'material' and 'non-material' proof of their family connection. Those were usually shared in the post-wedding moments and included photos, videos and stories. They recalled these as being important emotional traces for their family history constituted at a distance.

Beside weddings, the birth of their own children and the birth of nieces and nephews were also mentioned by the Brazilian migrant women and their family members in Brazil as important family times that they shared. The women who had their children in the UK recalled that their preparation stage began with their announcement of their pregnancy. The distinguishing features of this period were their interaction to ask questions about pregnancy and new-born babies' needs, checking if what they were feeling was 'normal', and planning their parents' and sisters' visits to help with the new-born baby. Regarding the birth of nieces and nephews, the migrant women distinguished the preparation moment as a period when they intensified their interaction with their siblings and sent gifts and new technology items for the babies.

For the actual birth day, those who had their children in the UK recalled that their mother was with them, and in cases when their mother could not be with them, there were their sisters or aunt. Regarding the births of their nieces and nephews, the Brazilian migrant women were not able to be present. However, they emphasized how they had taken part in the post-birth. They noted it as being a time when they engaged more in telephone calls and sending printed photos, in the 1990s, and from the mid-2000s onwards engaged in talking on Skype to see the baby, receiving photos by e-mail and, later, Facebook. Similar post-birth practices were done by them with their own children to their family members in Brazil. This sharing of the birth of a child was highlighted by the Brazilian migrant women as



marking that they had become a parent (or aunt), their parents had become grandparents and their siblings had become aunts and uncles.

Finally, the Brazilian migrant women mentioned the death of their father or mother as an especially sad family time that they ritualized from a distance. Like the other life-cycle moments, the funeral was considered as a family ritual, which was important to their constitution of a sense of familyhood. As with the weddings and births, the death of a loved one comprised a preparation stage, the actual funeral and the post-funeral stage. At the preparation stage they included the announcement of the death, where the distinguishing feature was the 'timing' of the telephone call, which led them to 'predict' the bad news. Moreover, the preparation stage involved talking with family members, mainly the brothers, about the decision of whether to go to the funeral day in Brazil.

Attending the funeral was reported as being difficult because of the high price of flight tickets at short notice, the distance and long hours of flying, employers' leave arrangements and the children's school, and the practice of fast burial in Brazil. Although most of them could not attend their parent's funeral in Brazil, they still marked the day in a special way, by engaging with some of the funeral rites or creating their own rites. However, for some of the migrant women, the death cycle only closed when they went to Brazil for the first time after their mother or father's death. This first visit was described as an important mourning moment, when they realized that their family dynamic had changed. These changes did not mean that they 'broke' or stopped their interaction with their family members in Brazil but, in fact, redirected their connections to other family members.

In this chapter I have shown that the Brazilian migrant women and their family members constituted and reconstituted their sense of familyhood by engaging in life-cycle rituals. These were important family rituals which allowed them to feel connected to their family's life-course pathways. In the concluding chapter of this thesis I reflect on how this analysis of the Brazilian migrant women's ways of 'doing' family with their family members in Brazil can contribute to enlarge the debate on transnational families and the importance of looking at the ritualization of family at a distance.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

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The main question guiding this thesis was how Brazilian migrant women in the UK ‘do family’ with their family members in Brazil. The process of ritualization of the family (by practising some family rituals and giving ritualistic features to some activities) was for them their main way of creating and recreating a sense of familyhood with their relatives in Brazil. I have argued here that the ritualization of family life is important in the (re)constitution of a sense of family, even among family members who have lived apart, in different countries, over a long period of time.

This thesis was framed to dialogue with transnational family studies. The research has highlighted that from the 1990s onwards more people (including different types of migrants: economic, asylum, middle-class or lifestyle migrants) have experienced transnational family lives (Baldassar and Wilding, 2014; Olwig, 2014; Baldassar, 2016). But despite being separated by distance and over time, transnational family studies have shown that migrants maintain a sense of familyhood (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002). It means that they continue to feel they ‘belong’ to a family, even though they may not see each other or be physically co-present often or for long periods of time. As Baldassar and Merla (2014:06) note, the resulting aim of transnational family studies is to capture and promote a growing awareness that ‘members of families retain their sense of collectivity and kinship in spite of being spread across multiple nations’.

Most of the studies on transnational families have tended to highlight that the sense of familyhood is sustained by the exchange of caregiving or mutual support, including economic support, accommodation, personal (hands-on) child care, and emotional and moral care exchange (Baldassar et al., 2007; Boccagni, 2010; Olwig, 2014; Izuhara, 2010a). The first studies on transnational families shed light on the care exchange between migrant mothers and the children left behind (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1997; Parreñas, 2001a). Later, other studies expanded beyond

this dyadic relationship and included other family relationships, such as caring for elderly parents ‘left behind’, left-behind fathers providing care, and care circulation among extended family members (Baldassar et al., 2007; Olwig, 2014; Kilkey and Möllenbeck, 2016; Schier, 2016; Baldassar, 2016).

Although, care exchange among family members is an important feature of the practice of ‘doing family’ (Morgan, 1996) at a distance, in this thesis I argue that transnational families also ritualize as a family at a distance. For the Brazilian transnational families studied here, it was through the ritualization of their family life that they felt they were not just maintaining it, but constructing and reconstructing family life with their relatives in Brazil. Thus, the key feature for the participants of this study in their process of ‘doing family’ was ritualizing practices as a family.

Many studies about the ritualization of family life and family rituals have researched families living in the same household, in close proximity or at a distance in the same country (Imber-Black and Roberts, 1998; Wolin and Bennett, 1984; Costa, 2011; Baxter and Braithwaite, 2006). They describe how family rituals usually provide important occasions for family members to perceive themselves as family. Some family scholars have observed that the ritualization of the family is a process that has been historically, culturally, socially and, even, biographically constructed (Gillis, 1996; Cheal, 2002; Morgan, 2011b). Studies on family rituals have identified that there are different forms of ritualizing as a family. They mostly recognize three main types of ritualizing among family members.

First, there are the major life events (weddings, births and funerals), which have been constructed as family rituals. These usually involve family members and people from outside the family and are less frequent events. Second, there are other family rituals such as birthdays, anniversaries and Christmas which are held annually. Finally, there are the ones simply called family ‘get-togethers’ (Morgan, 2011b:120), which have varying degrees of regularity. The last ones are less public, less obvious to capture and are usually part of what Costa (2011:95) calls family ‘small days’ (events happening daily, weekly or monthly). They are usually meaningful only to the inner family members, but their significance to the family can be captured in the retelling of family stories. Some transnational family studies

have shed light on life-cycle rituals practised among family members living apart in different countries. These studies have tended to focus on one particular family ritual, such as marriages or funerals (Mand, 2002; Olwig, 2002; Charsley, 2006; Gardner, 2002).

In this thesis, I have demonstrated that the transnational families studied here ritualized as a family not only during particular life-cycle events but also through the ritualized practices that take place regularly on 'small days' (Costa, 2011:95) (monthly, weekly and daily). These include practices repeated with more frequency and described as having ritualistic features. Moreover, these transnational families also ritualized as a family through rituals such as birthdays and Christmas, which are repeated annually. These family rituals and ritualized practices were important to the Brazilian families studied here in constituting their sense of familyhood throughout their migration for a long period of time.

This said, my thesis proposes to understand the ritualization of the family at a distance as composed by a set of activities that are not rigid or predefined, but historically, culturally, socially and biographically constructed and reconstructed daily, weekly, monthly, annually and along the life-course. In this sense, this thesis suggests thinking about the notion of family rituals as family practices (Morgan, 2011b) where the action in itself is relevant and constitutive of family rituals. I have identified in this thesis that these actions were usually mentioned as having some ritualistic features: a recurring action performed by and towards family members, resulting from an interaction which has a symbolic and affective meaning and can leave traces of the constitution and reconstitution of the family's life and sense of familyhood. These were understood as 'live' practices capable of being adapted and performed at a distance; and the sense of family is itself (re)constituted via the production of and engaging in these practices.

My thesis thus makes some empirical and analytical contributions to the study of transnational families. In this concluding chapter I bring together the key empirical and conceptual findings of this study, and briefly consider some points for future research.

### **Ritualizing as family transnationally**

The Brazilian migrant women in this study came from a low to middle class background, a typical profile in the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s (Torresan, 1995; Margolis, 2013; McIlwaine, 2011a, 2016). They explained they had moved to the UK to work, study and sometimes send money back home. However, sending remittances or other transnational practices (such as political, religious or economic links) were not what they recalled as most significant for them in their connection with Brazil. For them, family practices were their main connection. Hence, my study has focused on how they 'did family', creating and recreating a sense of familyhood with their family members in Brazil.

The narratives of these migrant women revealed that they did family with their family members in Brazil in three main ways. First, they distinguished certain practices which they gave a 'sense of ritual' (Bell, 1997:107). The participants considered these practices as their family 'get together' times monthly, weekly and daily. Second, they discussed practising family rituals such as birthdays and Christmas from a distance over their long period of migration. The 'doing' of these family rituals was seen as important because by practising them the participants were taking part in their family's annual calendar. Finally, they mentioned their participation in family life-cycle rituals, such as marriages, births and funerals. They identified all these activities as contributing to their family lives and keeping the sense of familyhood at a distance.

I have argued that, in isolation, these activities could be seen as just instrumental acts of communication. But in the inner context of their family interactions, they were meaningful for their transnational family's constitution. It was through these activities that they were able to create and recreate their family life over the long period of living far apart in different countries. They were ritualized, and it was in the action of doing them that the participants gained their sense of family. Thus, the ritualization of the family is not a secondary way of 'doing family', or acting out of pre-established structures, traditions or 'cognitive maps' (in Levi-Strauss's notion of ritual). They are meaningful acts performed by family members to help build their family.

My data revealed that the Brazilian migrant women of this study in the late 1980s and 1990s up to the mid-2000s constructed their main family times with their relatives in Brazil through the acts of writing, reading and exchanging letters and talking on the telephone. From the mid-2000s onwards, these were largely replaced by talking on Skype. Rather than describing these practices as just instrumental forms of communication with their family members in Brazil, they explained them as having some ritualistic features. They observed that the writing and exchanging of letters among their family members could not happen randomly, it had to follow a pattern – every month or fortnight, depending on the family. The regularity of this practice carried meaning for these families and enabled them to keep track of what was happening with their family in Brazil and even to keep their feelings of *'saudade'* under control.

Moreover, the act of crafting the letters, and even the reading of them, was mentioned as a practice which required some preparation (for example, buying 'special' paper, thinking what to write, drafting the letters, and choosing a quiet place to write or read them). These were moments they dedicated to their family members, where they acted as daughters or siblings. The act of writing and reading the letters provided in some a sense of *'liminal-like'* moment of connection with their family. Here, I relate Turner's (1969) notion of 'liminal' to the possibility of feeling it at a distance. I do not mean a total separation or break in everyday life. As Turner (1982) argues in his later work, in contemporary 'Western' societies, *'liminal'* moments such as the ones he and Van Gennep (1965) studied, have disappeared. But, he argues that a sense of *'liminal-like'* still exists in more secular and mundane practices. In the case of the transnational families of this study, I related this to how they felt when other activities were 'suspended' or momentarily stopped, and they could dedicate time to be with their family. The participants said that the moments of crafting the letters and even reading them in a quiet place, usually their bedrooms, were times that they set aside to be with their family members, despite the distance.

My study also revealed that the family letters, as material objects, had for some of the participants an almost 'sacred' power. In Durkheim's (1955) sense of the word, such objects have the function of mediating and approximating the 'sacred' and 'profane' world. It is possible that after those objects have been

through a ritual practice they acquire the ability to ‘overcome the profane’ and become a totem, giving them a value not previously recognized. Some participants of this study explained how letters from family members (in Brazil) were left on display and, I suggest, became ‘*totem-like*’ for them. Those letters helped them to face difficulties in the UK, to feel closer to their family members and heal the pain of being far away from their family. Although the letters were not connecting the world of the ‘sacred’ and the ‘profane’ in Durkheim’s religious sense, I argue that they were able to be a symbol of connection between geographically separated poles. Thus, for the transnational families studied here, the letters were given a value that only became apparent in my interaction with the participants.

During the time of my fieldwork, the practice of writing and exchanging letters stopped being done by the participants of this study. Nonetheless, they still considered it as an important practice for the constitution of their family as it could leave symbolic and affective traces to add to the memories and history of these transnational families. The letters served as material ‘proof’ of their connections. Miller and Madianou (2011) note that letters can be ‘proof’ of past family interactions. But the letters in this study represented more than this. By keeping them (in boxes) and not throwing them away, the participants expected the letters to act as ‘past proof’ of their connection with family members in Brazil, but also for the present and future. I observed that they considered keeping them as important to show to their own children.

Along with writing and exchanging letters, in the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s the Brazilian migrant women also discussed another practice of talking on the telephone. This constituted their family time monthly and every fortnight with their relatives in Brazil. Again, in isolation, talking on the phone could be seen as just another form of communication, but in the context of transnational family interactions it was described as having ritualistic features. It was a recurrent practice and as happened with the letters, my study revealed that it required some preparation, for example saving up coins during the week and thinking about the topics to talk about, as telephone calls were very expensive at the time.

The Brazilian migrant women described the act of making the phone calls as an important experience of ‘getting together’ with their family members. It was

distinguished by being able to hear each other's voices which was noted as a 'special' moment of their day each fortnight. It was a time when they could be daughters and siblings. In their narration it appeared as a *'liminal-like'* moment, when they could hear each other, and momentarily resolve their 'social drama' (to borrow Turner (1957:91)'s term) of living far apart. It does not mean that those moments were always harmonious. According to Turner (1982) conflicts can emerge during *'liminal-like'* moments, but this does not diminish their importance. For the transnational families in this study, having a *'liminal-like'* moment, by talking on telephone was described as an eagerly anticipated practice (whether harmonious or not). However, its recurrence was particularly affected by social constraints that they faced in both London and Brazil.

The practice of calling on the telephone was affected by 'territorialization' being restricted to location in particular places and at particular times. As Smith (2005) observes, transnational practices do not happen in a 'deterritorialized space'. Thus, in order to have this family time by telephone the Brazilian migrant women recalled having to go to phone booths, which were on the street. Some of them expressed enthusiasm when relating the emergence of phone shops in the UK which they remembered as being more private places. These provided them with the opportunity to engage with their families in Brazil for longer periods and even talk more about private issues. Those who had access to landlines had to use them in the kitchen or living room of the shared house where they lived which meant negotiating about its use with flatmates or landlords. In Brazil, access to landlines in the 1980s and 1990s was very expensive, so the family members there usually had to depend on going to neighbours' houses to talk to their daughters or siblings.

By the time of my fieldwork, the Brazilian migrant women were no longer relying on telephone calls for their main family time with their relatives in Brazil. Although some reported occasionally making calls, they said that from the mid-2000s, talking on Skype became the principal method for a family 'get together' on 'small days' (Costa, 2011:95). Nonetheless, as with the letters, they still recalled the practice of talking on the telephone as significant for their sense of familyhood. Unlike the letters, this practice had not left any material 'proof', but there were oral traces, when talking about their family constitution at a distance, which acted as 'proof' of their family interaction. This practice was important in constituting the



family's memories and history, which affects both the present and future of the family, passing on the message of the importance of constructing family connections.

As mentioned, from the mid-2000s the Brazilian migrant women were able to 'do family' with their relatives in Brazil by talking on Skype. This practice was described by them as their most recent way of having family time, which they usually did after work, around dinnertime or on Sundays (a day that has been historically constructed as a family day in Brazil). They reported using it in their houses, usually in the kitchen or living room. Talking on Skype allowed them to share historically, socially and culturally constructed family rituals they had performed in Brazil, such as having dinner, cooking, and watching TV together. Sharing such moments with their family members in Brazil provided a sense of closeness. The practice of talking on Skype enabled them to feel connected 'here' and 'now' and to share meaningful and affective symbols of their families such as their mother's cooking recipes, food instructions, or watching 'old' movies from their childhood or favourite TV programmes.

Thus, the practice of talking on Skype not only allowed them to interact more, it also enabled them to (re)construct and (re)signify family moments of simple 'get togethers' (Morgan, 2011b:120) that they previously had locally. However, I argue that the practice of talking on Skype cannot be considered as just a 'means' or a 'tool' for doing those family rituals as this could lead to disregarding the practice of using Skype as important in itself for the constitution of the sense of family at a distance. While this has been used for the main family time of the participants on 'small days' (Costa, 2011:95) since the mid-2000s, I do not intend to romanticize it.

Moments of talking on Skype were not always described as harmonious or totally satisfactory. They also included some conflicts and disappointments. Klein and White (1996) and Gillis (1996) argue that family events always involve both moments of harmony and conflict. While the Brazilian migrant women mentioned harmonious moments as well as discord on Skype, the moments of conflict were not seen as breaking their family's interactions. On the contrary, they noted that they had engaged in further moments of connection to resolve the conflict. Baxter

and Braithwaite (2006) state that family moments can involve a dialectic process of tension and repairing of tensions. The families studied here showed that 'doing family' by talking on Skype involved negotiated moments of 'pleasure' and conflict. It was a constitutive part of their family life experience at a distance.

My study shows that for the Brazilian migrant women in the UK and their family members in Brazil, practising family rituals such as birthdays and Christmas was also important for their sense of familyhood. As scholars Cheal (2008) and Gillis (1996) have pointed out, birthdays and Christmas became part of the family annual calendar only in recent times. In the case of Brazil, those events became part of the Brazilian family annual calendar from the first half of the twentieth century. As mentioned in the thesis, this occurred during the period of industrialization and urbanization of the country, and the mass migration from Europe to Brazil (Del Priori, 2006; Itani, 2003). At that time, nuclear family relationships were gradually becoming valued and the idea of 'sweet home' started to prevail. Celebrating birthdays and Christmas as family moments, then, emerged to become family rituals (Scott, 2013; Pinsky, 2013b).

Birthdays and Christmas are thus invented family traditions and celebrations (Wolin and Bennett, 1984; Imber-Black and Roberts, 1998; Fiese et al., 2002; Costa, 2011). These authors note that these family rituals have been stylized and carry some distinct symbols and expected ways of being performed. In this thesis, however, I have argued that 'expected ways' are not necessarily 'rigid' ways. Bell (1992:120) argues that ritualization is a creative act of production, constantly being produced and reproduced and this study shows that birthdays and Christmas were celebrated by the Brazilian migrant women and their relatives in Brazil in various different forms. They had constantly invented and reinvented their ways of practising them during their long period of geographical separation.

In their narratives, the participants mentioned that taking part in these two family rituals was how they engaged with their family's annual calendar events even while living at a distance. In the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s they marked birthdays and Christmas by writing and sending cards and making telephone calls. In order to differentiate these as special celebrations, they did not just send a normal letter. It had to be a 'special' decorated card, chosen carefully and crafted with

specific wishes and loving messages. The telephone calls to celebrate birthdays and Christmas also had to have differentiating features: birthday calls had to be directed to the person having the birthday, the calls had to be made on the right day, the actual birthday, Christmas Eve or Christmas Day and they involved talking about the details of those celebrations (food, decorations, participants). As happened with the letters and phone calls on 'small days' (Costa, 2011:95), these practices were recalled as symbolic and affective in their constitution of the family memories and history. They were also 'proof' (material and oral) of their participation in their family's annual calendar events. From the mid-2000s onwards, these family rituals were conducted by going online on Skype. This allowed them to take part in some birthday and Christmas traditions, such as singing 'Happy Birthday', blowing-out candles on the top of the cake, showing each other the party gifts and sweets, the decorations and food, and taking part in 'secret friends/secret Santa'. Sometimes birthdays and Christmas were celebrated with physical co-presence, particularly for the Brazilian migrant women whose parents were elderly and fragile.

Therefore, for the group in this study, practising family rituals such as birthdays and Christmas, even at a distance, was noted as being meaningful for constituting their sense of familyhood. Taking part in these family rituals, in their various forms, allowed them to establish their connection with their family in their annual calendar. They said that it helped them to feel that, although they were living at a distance, they still counted as family members.

It was also very important for the Brazilian migrant women and their family members to share life-cycle events such as marriages, the birth of children and the death of loved ones. As I showed in this thesis, like birthdays and Christmas, life-cycle events have also been constructed as family rituals and were practised by the participants of this study at a distance.

The Brazilian migrant women said that they celebrated their own weddings (in Brazil or in the UK) with their Brazilian family members. They also mentioned taking part in their siblings' wedding events. They negotiated their marriage preparations such as the wedding location, invitations, decorations, food, clothing, etc. with their family members. Some of the Brazilian migrant women went to Brazil to get married there, but in other cases, it was their family members from

Brazil who came over for their weddings in the UK. Some of them were involved in negotiations over the preparations and their attendance for siblings' weddings in Brazil. They also mentioned sharing the post-wedding stage with their families by sending photos and video-recordings. Sharing these marriage moments was an important way of affirming that even though they lived far apart, they still intended to play a part in the life of the new family.

The Brazilian migrant women of this study also stressed the importance of being part of the birth of children in the family, as a way of 'doing family' at a distance. They discussed their family members' involvement on the birth of their own children and their participation in the birth of their nephews and nieces. The preparation stage of the birth of the children involved the announcement of the pregnancy, sending gifts and buying products. Besides participating in the preparation stage, the Brazilian migrant women recalled that their mothers, or sisters, came to London to help them with the new-born baby. While the migrant women did not travel to Brazil for their nieces or nephews' births, they still engaged with them by making phone calls or Skyping their siblings on the birth day. They were also very involved with the post-birth stage, which included sending photos of the new-born babies, talking on Skype to show and even play with the babies.

Thus, for the participants of this study, taking part in significant moments on the birth of children in the family was a way of introducing and welcoming the new family members. In addition, for the Brazilian migrant women it enhanced their sense of becoming aunts and, for their family members, the experience of becoming grandparents, aunts/uncles and cousins. Thus, for the migrant women, being involved in the family rituals connected with the births (of their own child or their siblings' children) was a way of demonstrating that the new family members would be considered part of the family, even though living far apart.

In addition, my study showed that the Brazilian migrant women wanted to take part in the funerals of their father or mother from a distance, again in order to emphasize their sense of familyhood. They explained having to negotiate with some of their relatives over their father's or mother's funeral. They recalled the announcement of the death, their engagement in the funeral rites or even creating their own memorials in the UK for their mother or father who had died in Brazil.

Moreover, they reported their difficulties, post-death, in terms of mourning and the grieving process. They realized the importance of being physically in Brazil with their relatives to fully acknowledge their feelings about the death of the loved one and the changes that it made to their family dynamic. However, although the death of a mother or father transformed the dynamic of their family relationships, it did not mean any lessening of their family interactions from a distance. In fact, going through the funeral rites at a distance and mourning together with the family members in Brazil created a greater sense of togetherness as a family. After the death of their loved ones (particularly mothers) they had redirected their relationships towards other family members, usually their siblings. In this sense, family interactions constructed at a distance are very dynamic and adaptable to new circumstances along the life course.

This study, then, has made an important empirical contribution in demonstrating how transnational families involve much more than just the dyadic family relationships such as mother and left-behind children which was largely the focus of the first transnational family studies (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1997; Hochschild, 2000; Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002; Parreñas, 2001a, 2001b). In fact, the Brazilian migrant women studied here showed that their family's constitution across the distance included different family members such as aunts, uncles and cousins and sometimes even non-family members (for example, the mother's carer) besides the mother, father and siblings.

Although my study showed that the 'doing of family' by this group included various relatives, it was the mothers and sisters who were the main protagonists in the constitutive process of these families. Thus, I have highlighted that for the Brazilian families studied here, 'doing family' at a distance was not a gender-neutral process. It is still much more expected that the women (particularly the mothers and sisters) will promote and engage with the family rituals than the fathers and brothers. The mothers were reported, for example, as being the main instigators for the writing and exchanging of letters and the telephone calls. They were also the family members who were expected to attend their daughters' weddings, even in the UK, and to travel over to be present for the birth of their grandchildren in London, and to help post-birth. If the mothers could not attend, it was expected that sisters or aunts could fill the mother role. I also observed that when the mothers

died, strong links were usually created with the sisters to fill the void, but when the fathers died such redirection of connection was not mentioned.

Furthermore, my study has shown that the 'doing' of family life from a distance is a constant ongoing process which includes the Brazilian migrant women's agency and a number of social constraints. Examples included the difficulties accessing telecommunication technologies and transportation (e.g. high prices, location, time-consuming); national policy issues in the home and host countries (e.g. children's school calendar, fast burial); migration policy and visa restrictions (e.g. time limit to visit, money, employment and returners' proof to enter the UK); employment niches for migrants in low-paid jobs and sharing of accommodation. All of these social structural facts can play a part in hindering the process of 'doing family' at a distance.

Thus, my study makes some analytical and conceptual contributions to the way of thinking about transnational families, through the notion of ritualization of family life. It could serve as an analytical toolkit to understand the (re)construction of family relationships at a distance. I propose that transnational family studies should take into account the practising of family rituals and ritualistic features. Yet I also suggest that the ritualization of the family at a distance is not a way of 'naturalizing', normalizing or stabilizing the family. It is, rather, in the process of ritualizing those practices, as family members, that a sense of familyhood among families geographically separated for a long period of time can be constituted.

My thesis, then, contributes to the thinking that family relationships in the context of migration are not simply about continuity or maintenance of family practices previously established. But, in fact, transnational families are in a constant construction process. The participants of this study considered that the ritualizing of family practices encouraged them to continue their migration life, as they could be living far apart, but were still counted as part of their Brazilian family.

Moreover, the Brazilian migrant women's participation in the sets of activities framed here as ritualized family practices was not considered as an unreflexive involvement in the family 'traditions'. They were shown to be agents in the process of 'doing' these ritualized practices at a distance. However, their practices could not be considered as 'free-floating' (Guarnizo and Smith, 1998:11)

transnationally. I highlight a number of constraints, which influenced their capacity and/or opportunity to take part in them at a distance. I also highlight that the ritualization of families transnationally is not practised by all family members to the same degree; some family members play a bigger part in them than others, especially the women. Thus, looking at transnational family life through the notion of ritualization can contribute to showing that families are socio-historically, culturally, temporally and situationally constructed. At the same time, the transnational family members are not 'alien', and they produce their family life through various and mediated forms. The ritualization lens allows a deeper understanding of how the migrants and non-migrant family members, even from a distance and over a long period of separation, create time for family and 'do' family at a distance. I showed that for the group studied here, ritualizing as a family helped to provide a better sense of who they were as a family.

While it is hoped that this research has made a useful contribution to the transnational family discussion by bringing in the notion of ritualization of family life and family rituals, I am aware that many questions remain unanswered and require further research.

### **Future avenues for research**

To conclude this thesis, I would like to briefly outline some possible avenues for further study which could contribute to a better understanding of Brazilian family life constructed transnationally.

First, the work I undertook in this research suggests that more needs to be said about Brazilian migrant women in the UK. There is still a lack of knowledge about Brazilian migrant women's labour trajectory (paid and unpaid), their motherhood experiences (e.g. giving birth in a different country), intercultural marriage experiences, their ageing process and expectations on returning. It is an understudied group and I have only just begun to touch on one aspect of their complex migration experience.

Second, regarding family life constructed transnationally, I have identified a need to focus further research on Brazilian relationships with siblings and other relatives such as nieces and cousins. I have also identified a need for a comparative

study of Brazilian transnational family interactions and their local family practices and even their relationship with their neighbourhood. I noted that second-generation Brazilian migrants are now starting to become adults and some have already migrated to other countries. Therefore, I believe that further research should be focused on an understanding of Brazilian family relationships for second-generation migrants locally and transnationally. I also identified that a comparative study on how Brazilian migrant men and women experience family transnationally, with regard to the ritualization of the family, would merit further attention. It would also be useful to have further studies focusing at a deep level on how social policies, based on nation-state regulations, directly affect Brazilian transnational family interactions. It would also be instructive to have studies which map the influences of global capitalism and the implications in terms of limiting Brazilian transnational family relationships.

Third, as the technology of communication and transportation played an active role in the constitution of the Brazilian transnational families, I have suggested that more recent studies should take into account the impact of the newest technologies of communication (e.g. WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, Telegram, among others). At the time of my fieldwork, they were new technologies not yet widely used by the participants. In the light of this, it would be appropriate to carry out a comparative study on the consequences and impact of the incorporation of these technologies on Brazilian family relations, looking at how these new technologies are used, and for what purposes. These are questions which still need further exploration, and we as social scientists need to overcome the challenge of finding appropriate methodological and analytical tools to research these rapid transformations brought about by the latest technologies.

Finally, my study has shown that migration does not 'break' Brazilian family connections. In fact, the Brazilian family members studied have been able to construct and reconstruct their family relationships at a distance. For them, ritualizing as a family was an important way of 'doing family'. Thus, I argue that there is a need for awareness of the different forms of 'doing' family transnationally, which should be empirically informed. Moreover, I argue that there is a need for further awareness that Brazilian family life has undergone a number of changes in recent times and that its importance stretches far beyond national



borders. It has done so in the past and probably will continue in the future to be created and recreated at a distance. Thus, it is crucial to provide insights to confront any notions about the diminishing importance of family life.

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## Appendices

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### **Appendix 1: Interview schedule – Brazilian migrant women in the UK**

#### **General Profile**

Name of interviewee /Pseudonym:

Date of interview:

Place of interview:

Age:

Marital status:

Sons and daughters:

Educational level:

Occupation:

How long living in London:

#### **Part I. Open question**

Please could you tell me the story of your life before you came to the UK and about your migration to the UK, all the events and experiences that have been important to you; begin wherever you like, I won't interrupt you.

#### **Part II. Topics and further questions**

##### **Life in Brazil**

Could you tell me about your routine in Brazil with your family?

Where did you live (city or countryside), did you live with your family, what was your educational level, were you working or studying?

How was the process of organizing the trip, family influence/participation?

Do you remember the day you came? How was it? Who was with you?

Do you have siblings, nieces, nephews, grandparents? Are you the oldest or the youngest daughter?

Where did your parents live in Brazil? When you came to the UK were you living with your parents? How about your siblings?

Could you talk about how your parents and siblings reacted to your decision to come to the UK?

### **Settling in the UK**

Could you tell me what you remember of your first days in the UK?

(What were your first impressions? Where did you stay?)

What were the main challenges for you in the beginning?

1) Employment: Could you talk a little about your work experiences here in the UK?

(Topics: first job, experience in your current job, hours, contract or temporary, discrimination, expectations, feelings, other Brazilians, other forms of income)

2) Households

Could you tell me about the places (houses, flats) where you have lived here?

(Topics: shared house with friends or relatives)

3) Leisure

Could you tell me about your leisure activities here in the UK?

(Topics: changes over the years, talking with the family at weekends)

4) Migration status trajectory

Could you tell me about the visa you had, and have now?

### **Part III. Family practices and links/ties at a distance**

#### **1) Transnational family links/ties along the migration process: communication**

Experiences in the mid-80s and 90s
------------------------------------

Could you talk about your relationship with your parents/siblings in your first years here in the UK?

Do you remember how you told your family in Brazil about your arrival here in the UK?

When you arrived in the UK how did you communicate with your family in Brazil?

Can you tell me more about the exchange of letters, telephone calls, gifts and photos?

What was your routine for communication with your parents and siblings in Brazil?

Do you remember how often you received and sent letters to and from your family in Brazil? How about telephone calls?

Did you save the letters? Do you still have them? Do you look at or read them from time to time? How do you feel?

Is there any letter in particular that was special to you?

Do you remember any letters you sent or photos, cards that were special to you? Or had an impact on your family?

Did you used to send letters or cards on family special occasions? What occasions?

How about telephone calls? How often did you call your family in Brazil? Did they call you?

Do you remember any particular telephone calls?

Did you used to call on family special occasions? What occasions?

**Experiences from the 2000s. Information and communication technologies have developed and brought new forms of communication, thus, I would now like to ask some questions regarding this topic.**

Do you use the Internet (e-mail, Skype, Facebook) to interact with your family in Brazil?

Do you remember when you started using the Internet to communicate with your family (parents, siblings) in Brazil?

Could you tell me about the process of using these technologies in your relationship with your family?

What was your routine for communication with your family after you started using these new technologies? How often? What do you usually do?

In what situations do you like to use the new technologies (e-mail, Skype, Facebook)?

Do you use the webcam to talk to your family in Brazil? Do you remember the first time you talked to them on the webcam? How was that for you?

Are there any special occasions when you like to use the webcam to talk to your family?

Do you have any specific places in your house to talk?

Do you use Facebook? Do you upload photos of family events on social networks (Facebook)? Do you look at photos of family events on Facebook?

Now that we have mobile phones with the Internet and can be found anywhere:

Do you use mobile phones to talk to your family in Brazil?

Do your family call you on your mobile phone? When do they call you?

**2) Transnational family links/ties along the migration process: remittances, gifts, visits, family events**

Have you ever sent money to your family in Brazil? Have you ever received money from your family members in Brazil? (To/from whom? For what?)

Have you ever sent gifts on special dates such as: birthdays, Christmas? Have you ever received gifts from your family members in Brazil? (To/from whom? For what?)

How do you keep informed about family events (birthdays, births, marriages, funerals) and your family's daily news?

Is there a particular person in your family who tells you the news and information about your family in Brazil?

Do you remember any family event when you could not participate, because you were here? (birthday, birth, marriage, funeral). What did you do? How did you feel?

Have you ever received family members' visits? (From whom? For what?)

How often do you go to Brazil to visit your family? How has it changed during your migration trajectory?

Have you ever gone to Brazil for family events (birthdays, births, marriages, funerals)? Can you tell me more about some particular event that you remember?

How old are your parents? Are both alive? (If one has already died: Were you already here when your mother or father died? How did you handle this situation? Who told you? Did you go to the funeral?)

Do you remember some event or occasion when you went to Brazil to care for or help your parents?

**Part IV. Transnational family future perspective**

Do you intend to return to Brazil one day? What would make you return? How do you feel about it?

### **To conclude**

We have reached the end of the interview. I would like to ask you if you want to add anything or if you have any questions? Can I contact you in case of any queries or further questions?

Thank you very much!

PS: My research will have a second part in Brazil. I wonder if you would mind if I interviewed your parents or siblings.

## **Appendix 2: Interview schedule - Family of Brazilian migrants in Brazil**

Name of interviewee:

Date of interview:

Place of interview:

Age:

Marital status:

Sons and daughters:

Educational level:

Occupation:

Family relationship: ( ) Mother ( ) Father ( ) Sister ( ) Brother ( ) other, what? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Part I. Open question**

Please could you tell me the story of your daughter/sister's migration to the UK, all the events and experiences that have been important to you in this process; begin wherever you like, I won't interrupt you.

### **Part II. Topics and further questions**

#### **Life in Brazil**

Could you tell me about your routine in Brazil with your daughter/sister?

Did your daughter/sister live with you before going to the UK?

How did you take part in the process of your daughter/sister's organization of the trip to the UK?

Do you remember the day your daughter/sister went there? How was it? Who was with her?

Could you talk about how you reacted to your daughter/sister's decision to go to the UK?

### **Settling in the UK**

Could you tell me what you remember that your daughter/sister told you about the first days in the UK?

(What were her first impressions? Where did she stay?)

What were the main challenges for your daughter/sister in the beginning? And how did you feel about it?

1) Employment: Could you talk a little about what you remember about your daughter/sister's work experiences in the UK?

(Topics: first job, current job, hours, contract or temporary, discrimination, expectations, feelings, other Brazilians, other forms of income)

2) Households

Could you tell me about the places (houses, flats) where your daughter/sister lived there?

(Topics: shared house with friends or relatives)

3) Leisure

Could you tell me about the leisure activities your daughter/sister told you she did or does in the UK?

(Topics: changes over the years, talking with the family at weekends)

#### 4) Migration status trajectory

Could you tell me about the visa your daughter/sister had?

### **Part III Topics and further questions**

#### **Family practices and links/ties at a distance**

##### **1) Transnational family links/ties along the migration process: communication**

Before the Internet: experiences in the mid-80s and 90s
---

Do you remember what your daughter/sister told you about her arrival in the UK?

Could you tell me how communication was with your daughter/sister when she moved to the UK?

Can you tell me more about the exchange of letters, telephone calls, gifts and photos?

How was your routine for communication with your daughter/sister in the UK?

Do you remember how often you received and sent letters to her in the UK? How about telephone calls?

Have you saved the letters? Do you still have them? Do you look at or read them from time to time? How do you feel?

Are there any letters in particular that were special to you? Who used to send more letters?

Do you remember any letter you sent or photos, cards that were special to you? Or had an impact on your sister/daughter?

Did you used to send letters or cards on family special occasions (birthdays, Christmas, births, marriages, funerals)? What occasions?

How about telephone calls? How often did you call your sister/daughter in the UK? Did she call you?

Do you remember any particular telephone calls? What issues were discussed?

Did you used to call her on family special occasions (birthdays, Christmas, births, marriages, funerals)? What occasions? Did she used to call on these occasions?

What was the difference between talking on the telephone and writing/receiving a letter?

Experiences from the 2000s. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have developed and brought new forms of communication, thus I would now like to ask some questions regarding this topic.
--

Do you use the Internet (e-mail, Skype, Facebook) to interact with your daughter/sister in the UK?

Do you remember when you started using the Internet to communicate with your daughter/sister in the UK?

Could you tell me about the process for using these technologies in your relationship with your daughter/sister?

What was your routine for communication with your daughter/sister after you started using these new technologies? How often? What did you usually do?

In what situations did you like to use the new technologies (e-mail, Skype, Facebook)?

Did you use a webcam to talk to your daughter/sister in the UK? Do you remember the first time you talked to your daughter/sister on the webcam? How was that for you?

Are there any special occasions when you like to use the webcam to talk to your daughter/sister (birthdays, Christmas, births, marriages, funerals)?

Do you have any specific places in your house to talk?

Do you use Facebook? Do you upload photos of family events on social networks (Facebook)? Do you look at photos of family events on Facebook?

Do you use mobile phones to talk to your daughter/sister in the UK?

Does she call you on your mobile phone? When does she call you?

## **2) Transnational family links/ties along the migration process: remittances, gifts, visits, family events**

Have you ever sent money to your daughter/sister in the UK? Have you ever received money from your daughter/sister? (For what?)

Have you ever sent gifts on special dates such as: birthdays, Christmas? Have you ever received gifts from your daughter/sister? (For what?)

Is there a particular person in your family who tells your daughter/sister the news and information about the family in Brazil?

Has she ever come to Brazil for family events (birthdays, births, marriages, funerals)? Can you tell me more about some particular event that you remember?

Do you remember any family event when she could not participate, because she was living there? (birthday, Christmas, birth, marriage, funeral). What did you do? How did you feel?

Have you ever visited your daughter/sister? (For what?)

How often does she visit the family in Brazil? How has it changed during her migration trajectory?



Are there any occasions when you wished she was present, but she was not?

**Part IV. Transnational family reflections and future perspective**

How would you describe your relationship with your daughter/sister? Do you think the distance has changed your relationship? How?

Do you think she will return one day to live in Brazil?

Would you like her to return? Why?

What would make her take this decision? What would be the consequences for her?

**To conclude**

We have reached the end of the interview. I would like to ask you if you want to add anything or if you have any questions? Can I contact you in case of any queries or further questions?

Thank you very much!

**Appendix 3: Diary***Explanation letter*

**Goldsmiths**  
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

10/01/2014

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking part in the first phase of this doctoral research, accepting to do an interview. It was very important for the construction of this second phase of my study.

As this research aims to better understand the experiences of Brazilian migrant women living in the UK with their family members in Brazil, I would like to invite you to participate in the second phase of this research.

The objective of this second phase is to have a better understanding of the use of technologies in the interaction with relatives in Brazil. The purpose is to understand in more detail: who do you talk to, when do you talk, how and where do you talk, and your feelings and emotions involved.

The information you provide will be treated confidentially and will not be shared with anyone or any institution. All cited names will be changed and your identity will be kept anonymous.

I count on your contribution to continue my doctoral project.

On the next page, you can access detailed explanations about the diary and examples to better understand this methodology. I will contact you to better explain it and also will provide a notebook for the diary to be written.

Many thanks

Best Regards

Tânia Tonhati – taniatonhati@hotmail.com

### **About the Diary**

The completion of the diary is very simple. I would like to ask you to write down every time you speak with or contact your family in Brazil. There is not a model to be followed for writing and the examples below are just to help you to better understand the idea of this diary.

In order for this method to achieve good results, I would like to ask you to complete the diary during at least a period of 1 month. It can be extended, in case you think it is needed. It is important to note:

- 1) The means of communication used (e.g. fixed telephone, mobile phone, Skype, Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.)
- 2) Who was the family member you talked with or sent a message to (or a photo) (e.g. mother, father, brother, sister, cousin, uncle, aunt, etc.)
- 3) Where you were when contacted (e.g. at home, on the bus, tube, at work)
- 4) What was the subject of conversation in general (e.g. health of my mother, divorce of my brother, about my work day, etc.)
- 5) How you felt during the conversation.
- 6) How you felt after the conversation.
- 7) Other relevant information

Examples:

#### **Date: 20.01.2014 (Monday)**

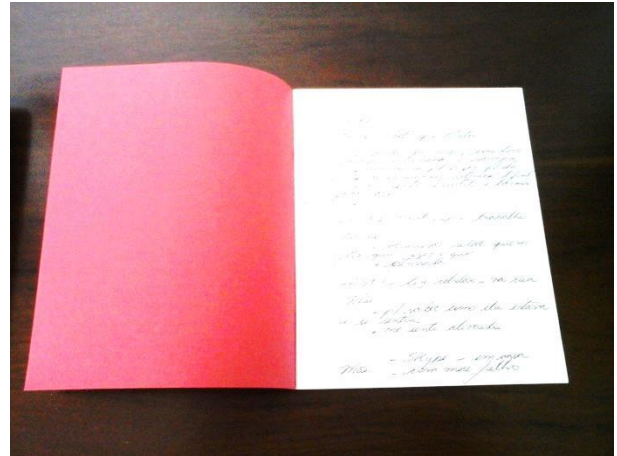
- This morning I received by email two photos of my nephew's birthday party. My sister sent the photos. I like to see pictures, I feel happy.

- Tonight I called my parents' house. I was at home. We talked about my work day and the visit to the doctor that my mother should do next week. During the conversation I felt good, but I'm worried about the results of medical tests.

#### **Date: 23/01/2014 (Wednesday)**

- I went on Skype to talk to my mother, but no one was online. I felt upset.

- I sent an email to my sister wishing her Happy Birthday.

*Diary Notebook*

## Appendix 4: List of Interviewees

### *Interviews in the UK*

	Pseudonym	Date and place of interview	Age	Region of origin	Marital Status	Since when in the UK	Civil Status	Job in BR	Jobs in UK	Education Level in BR	Education Level in UK	Countries Lived in	Family in Brazil mentioned	Family in the UK mentioned
1	Helena	House 08/05/2013	45	Santa Catarina	Married Brit	1991	Tourist/ Student ILR British Passport	Freelance Portugese and English teacher	Cleaner; Waitress; Interpreter; Student; Research assistant	Masters	PhD	UK	Mother Father (passed away) Brothers	Brother Husband Oldest son Daughter Son
2	Lucia	House 27/05/2013	50	São Paulo	Divorced Brit  Cohabit with partner	1986	Tourist/ Student ILR British passport	Student and Bilingual telephone operator	Cleaner; Waitress; Factory labourer; Telephone operator; Researcher	Degree	PhD	UK	Mother Father (passed away) Sister Brother	Ex-husband Partner
3	Flavia	Brazilian Shop 31/05/2013	46	São Paulo	Married Brazilian	1996	Residence card ILR British passport	Dentist	Housewife; Freelance dentist	Degree	No	UK and Portugal	Mother Father Sister Brother	Husband 2 Daughters Sister
4	Fatima	Work office/House 03/06/2013	43	Sao Paulo	Married Brit	1996	Tourist/ Student ILR British Passport	English Teacher	Cleaner; Waitress; College teacher; Researcher	Degree in Languages	PhD	UK	Mother Father (passed away) Brother Sister Niece/Nephew	Husband
5	Ana Clara	Art Studio 04/06/2013	46	Rio Grande do Sul	Widow	1988	Tourist/ Student ILR	Student	Cleaner; Waitress; Interpreter; Councillor and artist	Degree	Masters degree	UK	Mother Father (passed away) Sister	None

6	Patricia	House 06/06/2013	41	São Paulo	Divorced	1995	Tourist/ Student ILR	Student	Cleaner; Au pair; Waitress; Sale assistant	Degree	No	UK	Mother Father Brothers Niece	Ex-husband daughter
7	Carla	House 13/06/2013	38	Minas Gerais	Married German	2000	Tourist/ Student ILR*	Manager of computer company	Cleaner; Waitress; Sales assistant; Freelance film producer; Student	Degree	Masters	UK	Mother (passed away during fieldwork) Father Grandmother Brother Sister Aunt (mother's sister) Niece	Husband
8	Claudia	Square 09/07/2013	55	São Paulo	Single	1986	Work/ Student ILR British passport	Bilingual secretary	Au pair; Secretary; Administrative assistant	Degree	Masters	UK	Mother Father (passed away) Brother	None
9	Laura	Pub/House 21/07/2013	50	São Paulo	Divorced	1985	Tourist/ Student ILR	Children's charity	Cleaner; Waitress; Photographer; Catering company owner; Director of charity	High School	Degree	UK	Mother (passed away) Father Sisters	Daughter  Son (Australia)
10	Zilda	House 23/07/2013	50	Rio de Janeiro	Married British	1989	Tourist/ Student ILR British passport	Bilingual secretary	Cleaner; Waitress; Interpreter; Teaching assistant	High School	Polytechnic course	UK, US and China	Mother Father (passed away) Brother Sister Nephew Niece	Husband Daughter Son
11	Fernanda	House 02/08/2013	39	Rio Grande do Sul	Married Brazilian	1999	Student ILR	Psychologist	Cleaner; Waitress	Degree	Masters	UK	Mother Father Sister Brother Sister (Portugal)	Husband Daughter
12	Elsa	House 25/11/2013	54	Minas Gerais	Married Brit	1998	Tourist/ Student Waiting for residence card	Owner of business	Cleaner; Clothing designer	High School	Cleaner	UK	Mother Father (passed away) Sisters	Daughter Son Grandchildren
13	Juliana	House 09/12/2013	46	São Paulo	Married Brazilian	1995	Tourist/ Student ILR	Bank	Cleaner; Waitress; Sales manager	High School	No	UK	Mother (passed away during fieldwork) Father (passed away) Brother	Husband Son

							British passport						Brother	
14	Natalia	House 15/12/2013	42	Paraná	Married South-African	2000	Husband has working visa and she has dependent visa	Christian teacher	Christian teacher	Degree	No	South Africa UK	Mother Father Sister	Husband Son Daughter
15	Selma	House 05/02/2014	43	Paraná	Married Pole	2002	Tourist/ Student Residence card ILR British Passport	Teacher	Sale assistant; Business accounting for health company	Degree	No	UK	Mother Father Brother	Husband Son
16	Angela	House 10/02/2014	52	São Paulo	Married Brazilian	1988	Tourist/ Student ILR British passport	Teacher	Cleaner; Waitress; Teaching assistant	Degree	No	UK	Mother Father Brother	Husband 2 daughters

\*ILR – Indefinite Leave to Remain

*Diary in UK*

	Pseudonym	Delivery to the participant	Dates filled in	Participant delivery to researcher
1	Lucia	27/01/2014	29/01/2014-23/02/2014	26/02/2014
2	Flavia	25/02/2014	06/03/2014-25/03/2014	30/03/2014
3	Fatima	23/01/2014	23/01/2014 -23/02/2014	26/02/2014
4	Claudia	25/01/2014	26/01/2014 -26/02/2014	27/02/2014

5	Zilda	17/02/2014	20/02/2014-30/03/2014	05/04/2014
6	Juliana	20/01/2014	22/01/2014-15/02/2014	10/05/2014
7	Natalia	31/01/2014	01/02/2014-02/03/2014	10/03/2014

*Interviews in Brazil*

		Family Members	Name/ Pseudonym	Date and place of interview	Age	Marital Status/Children	Region of origin	Profession	Visits to the migrant
1.	Claudia Family	Brother	Flavio	11/07/2014 House São Paulo	65	Married / 2 Children	São Paulo	Retired	Yes
2.		Sister-in- law	Ana	11/07/2014 House São Paulo	62	Married / 2 Children	São Paulo	Housewife	Yes
3.		Mother	Luiza	11/07/2014 House São Paulo	86	Widow / 2 Children	São Paulo	Housewife	Yes
4.	Patricia Family	Mother	Antonia	08/07/2014 House São Paulo	65	Widow/ 2 Children	São Paulo	Retired	Yes
5.		Brother	Celso	10/07/2014 House	42	Married/ 1 Child	São Paulo	Officer	Yes



				São Paulo					
6.	<b>Laura Family</b>	Sister	Fabiana	28/07/2014 Shopping centre São Paulo	49	Cohabiting/ No children	São Paulo	Accounting for companies	Yes
7.	<b>Zilda Family</b>	Sister	Amanda	06/12/2014 House Rio de Janeiro	55	Married/ 2 Children	Rio de Janeiro	Housewife	No
8.		Mother	Beatriz	06/12/2014 House Rio de Janeiro	76	Widow/ 4 Children	Rio de Janeiro	Housewife	Yes
9.	<b>Lucia Family</b>	Sister	Mara	10/07/2014 House São Paulo	49	Single / No children	São Paulo	English teacher	Yes
10.		Brother	Bruno	14/01/2015 House São Paulo	53	Single	São Paulo	IT professional	Yes
11.		Mother	Simone	14/01/2015 House São Paulo	80	Widow	São Paulo	Housewife	No
12.	<b>Helena Family</b>	Mother	Amalia	19/01/2014 House Santa Catarina	73	Widow/ 5 Children	Santa Catarina	Retired	Yes
13.	<b>Angela Family</b>	Mother	Maria	10/12/2014 House Minas Gerais	76	Married	São Paulo	Retired	Yes
14.		Father	João	10/12/2014 House Minas Gerais	80	Married	São Paulo	Retired	Yes

