# Italian Families and Social Capital: Rituals and the Provision of Care in British-Italian Transnational Families

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# Table of contents

Forward

The Ethnicity Strand - one of three strands[1] within the Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group - comprises three distinct but closely integrated research projects. Separately and together these projects address a number of related issues about families and young people's diasporic identities; household and family rituals; and family care and provisions in a transnational world. These projects in turn are designed to integrate into the overall research programme of the Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group through an exploration of the concept and utility of social capital as identified, measured and funneled through (a) identities and values, (b) trust and reciprocity, and (c) caring for and about members of families and broader communities in Britain and selected communities abroad.

After all, Britain is today generally thought to be a multi-cultural society, displaying a rich variety of family forms, traditions, and close and continuing links with extensive kinship networks originating in, or extending to, a number of other European countries, South and East Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. Such diversity has invariably been part and parcel of the social and cultural changes occurring in contemporary Britain, within a globalising world. With regard to families, it is urgently necessary to have a closer understanding of the kinds of cross-fertilizations that are taking place in the dynamics of everyday life within and across national boundaries.

This working paper is a review of concepts and available literature relevant to one of the three projects under our Ethnicity strand, namely, Italian families and social capital: rituals and the provision of care in British-Italian transnational families.

The general aim of the Ethnicity Strand of the Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group is critically to examine areas of family life deemed to be significantly determined by kinds of social capital generated by ethnicity. This Italian families and social capital: rituals and the provision of care in British-Italian transnational families project itself will:

- explore the extent to which ethnicity is perceived, utilised and reproduced as social capital or resource in the processes of lived family life;
- explain how ethnic values and solidarity affect or condition family behaviour and structure/organisation in conditions where communities are adjusting to new situations;
- examine the kinds of changes that occur within families as a result of ethnic plurality or mixing in a multi-cultural society;
- explore how ethnicity as social capital is reproduced within the discrete domains of families and kinship relationships across national boundaries;
- integrate specific empirical and theoretical studies across the concerns of the research group as a whole;
- consider the theoretical implications for our understanding of social capital and social change;
- suggest some implications for social policy in Britain and Italy.

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[1] The other two are Intimacy, and Education & Employment.

The project will examine the use, production and maintenance of social capital in the context of migration through an in-depth analysis of the every-day experiences of British families of Italian backgrounds in the UK and Italy. In the context of migration, and particularly with increasing transnational social relations, family traditions and values as aspects of collective ethnic identity may be activated as a social capital resource, as several observers have variously shown (see, for example, Portes and Zhou 1993, Foner 2001). This project empirically investigates the 'extent to which ethnicity is perceived, utilized and reproduced as social capital in the processes of lived family life' (Goulbourne and Solomos 2003: 336). It will, therefore, critically question the view that while some ethnic groups possess social capital, others may lack this resource; as well as exploring the problematic or ambivalent nature of social capital by taking into account its possible negative effects. Questions will also be raised about who benefits and who loses from the generation of social capital and the implications of possessing or lacking social capitals for individuals, families and groups. In exploring these issues, particular attention will be paid to the gender and generational dimensions of family life with regard to social capital.

The project will concentrate on two ways in which British-Italians produce and maintain social capital, namely household and family rituals and the provisions of care across countries and generations. This is expected to shed new light on two important facets of social capital: the ways in which trust and reciprocity operate among groups and generations; and the implications of caring for and about members of families and broader communities. This project will outline care work within families, how such work is organized, and the effects of this work and its organization.

This research will be done by exploring a number of rituals that depend on the inner working of family, household and kinship networks for their reproduction, and which arise from the cycle of life: birth, death and burial; courtship and marriage; childhood adolescence and the entry into adulthood (Goulbourne and Solomos 2002). As Grillo and Gardner have pointed out, such rituals 'make statements about membership, or at least claims to ongoing membership, in the community of origin, at any rate for the time being, and these statements have both a symbolic and practical significance' (2002: 186). The project will raise and explore questions about ritual practices regarding the use and reproduction of social capital and identify patterns of change over time (Goulbourne and Solomos 2002).

The project will also explore how families reciprocate mutual obligation of care across the generations and state-borders. It will analyze traditions and practices of care and obligations; how families initiate and develop strategies for coping across national boundaries and prospects for the continuing use, reproduction or atrophy of past practices and traditions of care (Goulbourne and Solomos 2002). These aspects will be considered comparatively by looking at North/South variations among Italians as well as by taking into account practices and experiences of the other ethnic minority groups studied in the ethnicity strand (Caribbean and South Asians) of the Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group (see Mand 2004; Reynolds 2004).

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Ethnicity Strand Leaders

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Introduction


Social capital is often associated with cohesive communities based on face-to-face relations, little affected by change, ethnically homogeneous and largely harmonious. This picture, however, scarcely reflects the reality of contemporary multicultural British society. Like other Western societies, Britain is going through important social changes that include those caused by globalisation, South-North migration and the transnationalisation of social and family life for a growing percentage of its population. This paper's focus on Italian families and social capital offers a grounded account of the everyday experiences of families of Italian origin who reside in the UK, paying particular attention to two aspects that seem crucial for the production and maintenance of social capital in the family: household and family rituals and the provision of care.

Italians are a numerically significant group with a long and complex migration history to the UK and they have an interesting and contradictory position within the mainstream social capital and ethnicity literatures. On the one hand they have been comparatively little studied in the UK literature on ethnicity, while on the other hand they seem to have enjoyed a central position in some mainstream social capital debates. Putnam et al. (1993), for instance, have looked at Italy as a paradigmatic case and Granovetter (1973) has focused on Italians to asses the value of strong versus weak ties.

What follows locates the study of Italians in the UK within broader debates on social capital, ethnicity and transnationalism. The first section critically reviews the mainstream literature on social capital from the perspectives of transnationalism and migration, ethnicity and gender. Attention is then focused, in the next section, more specifically on transnationalism and the family. I spell out my assumptions on the family and provide some analytical tools for studying contemporary transnational families in relation to social capital. I then provide some background data on the changing nature of the Italian family, followed by a consideration of the 'state of the art' on Italians in the UK and critical reviews of the ways in which Italian families have been portrayed in this literature. I conclude the review by proposing some ways to study social capital and transnational Italian families.


Social capital, transnationalism, ethnicity and gender

Social capital is a much-debated concept which does not seem to have a clear or agreed meaning. Whether social capital is generated in groups or in families is also a contested issue (see Edwards et al. 2003). For Coleman social capital is generated in the family. He defines social capital by its function as:

not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: they all consist of some aspect of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure. (Coleman 1990: 302)

In Coleman's view social relations produce social capital in three main forms. First, by generating high levels of obligations and expectations. Second, by providing what he calls information potential, and third by generating norms and effective sanctions. He stresses the importance of closure of social networks for the creation and maintenance of social capital which, in his view, allows the emergence of norms and increases the level of trust among the members of the network.

Families in Italy have been described in parts of the sociological literature as possessing the type of 'intergenerational closure' characterized by a dense social structure of norms, extensive trust and obligations described by Coleman[2]. However, the compactness of Italian families and their strong networks of reciprocity have often been seen in negative rather than positive terms. According to a survey conducted by The Economist, the Italian family is held responsible, among other things, for 'the lack of public spirit in Italy, and even of the concept of public good … It explains the Mafia, the biggest family of them all' (quoted in Ginsborg 2003: 68). The preoccupation with the negative consequences of strong Italian family relations for Italian society at large has its origin in the work of Banfield on Southern Italy. In his study of a Basilicata village he coined the term 'amoral familism' to describe 'the inability of the villagers to act together for their common good, or indeed, for any good transcending the immediate, material interest of the nuclear family' (Banfield 1958:10). From then on a number of authors have stressed the negative consequences of Italian 'familism'. For Paul Ginsborg, Italian familism:

> should be viewed as a particular form of the relationship between family, society … and the state; a form in which the values and interests of the family are counterposed to the other principal moments of human associationism. … In Italy's case, the very strength of family units … when linked to the relative weakness of civil society, especially in the South, and to a profound distrust in the state, allowed familism to persist in its modern form (Ginsborg 2003: 97-98).

Coleman's stress on the value of dense ties of solidarity within families seems to be in contradiction with this analysis of Italian familism as well as with Putnam's stress on the benefits of 'bridging' social capital (Edwards et al. 2003:7). Putnam seems to think that strong links within families (bonding social capital) may be less valuable for both individuals and society at large than weaker horizontal links that bridge outside the family (bridging social capital). The former is 'inward looking and tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups' (Putnam 2000: 22) whereas the latter is 'outward looking and encompasses people across diverse societal cleavages' (2000: 22). In his view, the first only allow people to 'get by' whereas the latter allow individuals to get ahead and communities to prosper.

What distinguishes Putnam's position from that of Coleman is that, whereas the latter is interested in social capital for the generation of human capital, Putnam's interest lies in the impact of social capital for democracy and economic prosperity. For Putnam, social capital is a public good which is

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[2] See section on Italian families below.

generated in the community and not in specific families. In his definition, social capital refers to 'features of social organizations, such as networks, norms and trust, that facilitate action and co-operation for mutual benefit' (Putnam et al. 1993: 35).

Putnam derives much of his theory from a study of Italian regions (Putnam et al. 1993). His thesis is that those regions that work most effectively and are economically more prosperous have a strong civil society that guarantees high levels of trust and cooperation among people. He calls these regions 'civic' and he distinguishes them from the 'uncivic' regions where cooperation is low, local governments are inefficient and economic prosperity is lacking. For Putnam, there are parts of Italy that are rich in social capital (the northern and central regions) and parts that lack it (the regions of the south). Putnam's distinctions between civic and uncivic regions echo old portraits of the north/south divide in Italy and are therefore problematic. Are then emigrants from the civic north richer in social capital that those from the uncivic south? Should receiving societies, like Britain, welcome the arrival of the former and discourage the latter? These kinds of considerations were apparently made by the post-war Australian government to distinguish between desirable and undesirable Italians. They clearly differentiated the northerners who were seen as self-sufficient and democratic from the dependant Southerners who supposedly lacked any tradition of civic engagement and were used only to the law of the knife (Castles, Vasta and Lo Bianco 1992: 124).

Social capital and migration

Three main areas seem to be problematic in the mainstream social capital literature. These are the treatment of migration and movement, ethnicity and gender. The first problem lies with the treatment of migration and transnationalism. Both Coleman and Putnam seem to think that mobility is directly linked with a decline in social capital for both the families concerned and for the communities they leave behind. For Coleman, 'individual mobility constitutes a potential action that will be destructive of the structure itself – and thus of the social capital dependent on it' (Coleman 1990: 320). For Putnam, the best form of social capital is place-based and derives from strong bonds of community (1996). From this premise we should thus expect migrants to lose these bonds and thus their social capital.

Literature on trasnationalism, however, has shown the amount of skills and resources that have to be mobilized to sustain groups and family life across national borders (see Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Goulbourne 2002; Goulbourne and Chamberlain 2001; Parreñas 2001; Portes et al. 1999; Vertovec 1999; Zontini 2002). Transnationalism is usually employed to refer to 'sustained ties of persons, networks and organisations across the borders across multiple nation-states, ranging from little to highly institutionalised forms' (Faist 2000: 190). Fluid relationships between two or more countries are the norm for many immigrant groups. Scholars working on transnationalism do not identify mobility with the loss of social capital but rather with its recreation in new forms. It has been shown how immigrants depend on networks and solidarity ties (social capital) in order to sustain their transnational activities (Goulbourne 2002; Portes et al. 1999; Vertovec 1999). Even though immigrants' daily life is not bounded in localised communities, it continues to be based on networks where solidarity and trust operate (Levitt 2001). As Gupta and Ferguson point out:

> Something like a transnantional public sphere has certainly rendered any strictly bounded sense of community or locality obsolete. At the same time, it has enabled the creation of forms of solidarity and identity that do not rest on an appropriation of space where contiguity and face-to-face contact are paramount (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:9).

Peggy Levitt (2001) identifies social capital as one form of remittance that migrants transfer back to their country of origin. The more tightly connected and dense is the system that links sending and receiving societies, the more efficient will be the flow of these social remittances. Their transmission can occur in a number of ways such as 'when migrants return to live in or visit their communities of origin, when non migrants visit those in the receiving country, or through exchanges of letters, videos, cassettes, emails and telephone calls' (Levitt 2001: 63). However, the beneficiaries of social capital are not only those in the sending societies. People in the receiving society may view and use their homeland ties as potential tools 'that can be activated or deactivated at different stages of the life cycle, as is most expedient' (2001: 21). One example of this is the recent rediscovery of their 'Italian roots' by a number of South Americans of Italian descent (especially Argentineans and Brazilians). These latent links with their 'country of origin' may prove crucial for gathering the relevant documentation for obtaining a European citizenship that can offer the possibility to escape the economic hardship of their countries[3].

The desire to reinvigorate or maintain links with the country of origin is not new. Italians seem to have always retained strong links with Italy and with other locations of their diaspora. In 1956, Garigue and Firth wrote in their study of Italians in London:

> One of the main characteristics of the kinship universe of the Italianates is its geographical dispersal. Each kinship group not only links persons residing in a number of countries, but also persons living in a number of localities in each country (Garigue and Firth 1956: 88).

Chain migrations from Italian villages to the UK and other destinations, but also return moves to Italy, were facilitated by information and resources circulating in strong networks linking Italian villages with a number of countries around the globe. The 'loyalty' to Italy felt by members of the second and even third generation of migrants in the UK captured public and academic attention from the 1950s onwards. Such loyalty was seen by some as at the root of Italians supposed slow rate of assimilation (Palmer 1977).

Social capital and ethnicity

The second problem with the social capital literature is its limited consideration of ethnicity. When ethnicity is mentioned, it seems to be in relation to the lack of social capital of inner city ethnic minorities (Putnam et al. 1993). Some authors seem to imply that increasing ethnic diversity is at the root of the decline of social capital in society (Leigh and Putnam 2002). However, if we define ethnicity as 'socio-cultural factors such as shared histories, memories, myths, customs, sentiments and values' (Goulbourne and Solomos 2003: 330), we could interpret it as a social capital type resource. Goulbourne and Solomos describe ethnicity as 'a currency of a social capital nature which may be nurtured and invested, squandered, lost, or shared, mixed and utterly changed as a

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[3] Italian citizenship is based on descent (ius sanguinis) and can be obtained by direct descendants of Italian citizens.

result of meetings at boundary points' (2002: 4). A key issue, therefore, is 'the extent to which ethnicity is perceived, utilized and reproduced as social capital or resource in the process of lived family life' (Goulbourne and Solomos 2002: 3).

Whereas some authors, like Putnam, have pointed out the lack of social capital of inner-city ethnic minorities, other authors have shown the existence of strong networks of cooperation among ethnic minority groups. One problem with the latter studies is that sometimes the cooperative nature of certain ethnic minority groups has been idealized. This literature, along with the general one on social capital, tends to overemphasize the positive sides of strong networks and to overlook power relations within groups. Portes (1998) identifies two areas in which researchers have drawn attention to the positive nature of strong ties in migration research. The first one is that of immigrant and ethnic entrepreneurship and the second is that of ethnic business enclaves and ethnic niches. All these studies highlight network-mediated benefits. They, however, pay scant attention to 'the actual and potential gainers and losers in transactions mediated by social capital' (Portes 1998: 7).

This literature also distinguishes those groups that possess social capital - and thus are supposedly well integrated into society - and those who lack it - and are thus responsible for their situation of marginalization. Goulbourne and Solomos (2003) believe that rather than focusing on immigrants' cultural baggage, i.e. their social capital, racism should be taken into account (Solomos 1988; Back and Solomos 2000). Also, attention has to be paid to the economic and political relations in which social capital operates (Molyneux 2001).

Possessing social capital is sometimes seen as an alternative to provisions and policies aimed at reducing social exclusion (Molyneux 2001). Thus, being seen as possessing social capital is not necessarily good for the group concerned, as I found in my study of Moroccan and Filipino women in Bologna and Barcelona between 1999 and 2001 (Zontini 2002). In Bologna, given the lack of adequate funding dedicated to alleviate the difficult living conditions of immigrants, those who were seen by the Council as more able to 'get by' by themselves were the ones who received less support. Here is how one of my respondents (a Filipino domestic worker) reported her experience:

> We applied for a council flat but … nothing. No Filipino ever gets to the top of the council's list…there is no Filipino in council housing, they are all Moroccans, and other nationalities … .  I don't know why … what I got to know is that the council said that Filipinos can cope by themselves, they are good guys, but we also need a house! They don't make laws that are the same for everybody! (Zontini 2002: 123).

Ethnicity for white ethnics involves choice as well as constraints and change over the life course (Waters 1990). Rather than focusing on static notions of ethnicity and on specific group characteristics that may favour or undermine social capital, it is important to understand how often, under what circumstances and in what ways ethnic identity is used as a resource in everyday life. This can happen, for instance, when individuals draw on specific family values and norms for their advantage (e.g. when grandparents are expected to look after grandchildren by their children, when daughters are obliged to serve their fathers and brothers, or when newlywed children rely on their parents' financial resources to purchase a house or start a business). Ethnicity can be used as a resource also to market one's own economic activity, such as a restaurant or a shop or simply as a way of getting access and membership to a group, enjoy the resources that circulate within it (e.g. information) and establish relationships of trust and solidarity. Another important aspect to

analyze is how identity is inter-generationally transmitted within families (Waters 1990). With this I mean how specific norms and values of first generation migrants are passed on to and incorporated by members of the second generation, which aspects of these norms and values are accepted and perpetuated, and which are contested or resisted.


Social capital and gender

Finally, much of the social capital literature is silent on the issue of gender (Molyneux 2001). One aspect on which scholars seem to agree is that social capital is a resource that needs constant investment (Coleman 1990; Putnam 1996). In Coleman's words, 'social relationships die out if not maintained; expectations and obligations wither over time; and norms depend on regular communication' (Coleman 1990: 321). Bourdieu makes a similar point when he says that:

> the existence of a network of connections is not a natural given … It is the product of an endless effort at institution, of which institution rites – often wrongly described as rites of passage – mark the essential moments and which is necessary in order to produce and reproduce lasting, useful relationships that can secure material or symbolic profits (Bourdieu 1997: 52).

Given the fact that the work of reproducing social capital requires the expenditure of time and energy, it would be interesting to know more about the consequences of this kind of work for the individuals involved in it.

Many authors seem to attribute to women the role of social capitalists. Such a role may offer women satisfaction and even power in the family. This, however, is not always the case since women may also experience 'disharmony, conflict, and anguish at family gatherings' (Pleck 2000: 11). The assumption that women are naturally predisposed to serve their families or communities needs to be problematised (Molyneux 2001) so as to take into account power relations within families and groups, and the cost that the work of producing social capital has on women. Some of these issues will be picked up in the following section.

Particular attention needs to be paid to power relations within families and groups, especially along gender and generational lines and to some extent between families and groups. Following Portes (1998) and Molyneux (2001), my assumption is that social capital is not necessarily positive for everyone all the time. As we have seen, women for example may have a crucial role for the creation and maintenance of social capital. Such a role, however, may be experienced by some of them as an unwanted burden, as my study of Filipino and Moroccan migrant women in Southern Europe has shown (Zontini 2002).


Transnationalism and the family

Much of the literature on social capital places a strong emphasis on the family. The family, however, is often described in normative and static terms. New forms of family life seem, for many of the social capital theorists, at the root of what they perceive as the decline of social capital (Coleman 1997; Leigh and Putnam 2002). The emerging literature on transnational families

challenges these static and normative views (Bryceson and Vourela 2002; Goulbourne and Chamberlain 2001; Parreñas 2001; Zontini 2002). Such literature recognizes the diversity in family forms and shows how families and communities do not disintegrate as result of migration but get reconstituted in new forms.

Thus families should not be seen as static and homogeneous but rather as dynamic and diverse (Chamberlain 2001). Following Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, the family 'is not considered a collective unit but is instead presented as a contentious site that involves conflicting interests among its members' (2001: 83). In particular, families and households are divided along gender and generational lines, as I discuss further below. Further, Nancy Foner has defined the immigrant family as:

> A place where there is a dynamic interplay between structure, culture, and agency, where creative culture-building takes place in the context of external social and economic forces as well as immigrants' premigration cultural frameworks' (Foner 1997: 961).

Transnationalism complicates the definition of households and families. If normally the household can be defined as 'a group of people who share the same residence and participate collectively, if not always co-operatively, in the basic tasks of reproduction and consumption' (Chant and McIlwaine 1995: 4), in transnational households one parent, both parents or adult children may be producing income abroad while other family members carry out the functions of reproduction, socialization, and the rest of consumption in the country of origin (Parreñas 2001). Thus, transnationalism forces us to reconsider our understanding of households and families based on the idea of co-residency and physical unity and to take into account the possibility of spatial separation.

Within the literature on transnationalism, Faist (2000) identifies the emergence of transnational kinship groups as one of three types of transnational social spaces arising from international migration. Glick Schiller et al. (1992), in their seminal work 'Towards a transnational perspective on migration' called, among other things, for the examination of 'the implications of current day transnationalism for kinship relations, family organisation, and the form and content of networks' (1992: xii). In their own paper Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton note how family networks are stretched, reconfigured and activated across national boundaries to cope with economic uncertainty and subordination (Glick Schiller et al. 1992: 54).

Several studies have shown that women are involved in both productive and reproductive work to help maintain their families transnationally. Alicea (1997), for instance, draws on Di Leonardo's work to show the crucial importance of women's kin and care work for sustaining their transnational families. Feminist researchers have long drawn attention to women's non-market activities and defined them as labour. Di Leonardo's contribution (1984, 1992) has been to add the work of kinship to the list of women's activities.

Di Leonardo defined kin work as:

> the conception, maintenance, and ritual celebration of cross household kin ties, including visits, letters, telephone calls, presents, and cards to kin; the organisation of holiday gatherings; the creation and maintenance of quasi kin relations; decisions to neglect or

intensify particular ties; the mental work of reflection about all these activities; and the creation and communication of altering images of family and kin vis-à-vis the images of others, both folk and mass media (Di Leonardo 1992: 248).

Kin work seems to assume a crucial relevance in the context of geographically dispersed families. The very existence of transnational families does, in fact, rest on kin ties being kept alive and maintained, in spite of great distances and prolonged separations. Bryceson and Vourela (2002) have recently highlighted this, and advanced two concepts to study transnational family making, namely 'frontiering' and 'relativizing'. The first refers to 'the ways and means transnational family members use to create familial space and network ties in a terrain where affinal connections are relatively sparse' (Bryceson and Vourela 2002: 11). The second refers to the ways 'individuals establish, maintain or curtail relational ties with specific family members' (2002: 14). Goulbourne and Chamberlain (2001: 42), in their study of transnational Caribbean families, have found that 'geographical distance is no barrier to being a "close" family and informants stressed the importance of [transnational links], the "tightness" of the emotional bonds, and the level of "trust" expected and experienced between family members'.

Although, at times, there are men who do the 'kin work' (see Goulbourne 2002) in the aggregate women seem to do more of it (Di Leonardo 1984). Also, kin work is a gendered activity, with men and women normally focusing on different aspects of it. For instance, in her study of transnational Sikh marriages, Mand (2002) noted how women were relegated to the organisation of the domestic and local side of wedding celebrations whereas men took up the more prestigious public and transnational side. Often women tend to have a greater share of kin work than men. Salih (2001), for instance, describes the preparation work that migrant women do before their annual visit during the August holidays in Morocco. Such preparation (which involves things like buying presents for relatives left behind and the planning of gatherings and celebrations) normally starts one or two months before the date of leaving, with some women dedicating to it almost the entire year.

Caring work involves those tasks related with looking after the young, the sick and the elderly. When done by family members, it is usually an unpaid activity, which in most societies is generally relegated to women. Performing caring work in a transnational family thus means women having 'to monitor and meet the physical and emotional needs of individuals in more than one household [in more than one country] and balance their time and energy between these' (Alicea 1997: 318). Case studies dealing with immigration in a variety of geographical locations all mention the stretching of immigrant women's responsibilities brought about by transnationalism. Many authors have noted how the familial relationships and responsibilities of female migrants span more than one country, sometimes more than two. This is the case for the Cape Verdean women interviewed by Andall (1999) who have family responsibilities and connections in Italy, Cape Verde, Portugal and the Netherlands. Salih (2001) too notes how Moroccan women had to perform care activities in a transnational sphere in which they had to simultaneously be available for husbands and children in Italy, and ill and elderly parents in Morocco. The same seems to be the case for Italian women: 'Going to Italy is like going to another home: there, I still do the cooking, cleaning, shopping. There is no difference' (Olive Besagni writing in the UK published Italian newsletter Blackhill, quoted by Fortier 2000: 63).

Kin and caring work seem to represent two crucial and interconnected aspects of the production and maintenance of social capital within and across families. Considering these two aspects may

help us to shed light on how relationships are maintained in families and groups that are geographically dispersed and on how forms of reciprocity operate among them. It also helps to explore the possible link existing between investing in social capital (e.g. through kin work) and its potential benefits to certain individuals (e.g. as recipients of care work).

The changing nature of Italian families

Before moving on to review the literature on contemporary Italian families in the UK, I will provide a brief background description of the evolving nature of Italian families in Italy. Italian families have traditionally been depicted as large extended units characterised by a high number of children, headed by a patriarchal father and run by a housewife mother. This stereotypical image, however, does not reflect at all contemporary Italian families. In Southern Europe, several key economic and demographic transformations - such as the expansion of the service sector, the casualisation and informalisation of work, birth rate decline and ageing - have proceeded further and faster than in other parts of Europe (King and Zontini 2000: 49). In only a few decades, Italy has moved from having an above average fertility rate to having one of the lowest fertility rates in the world, which in 1993 was 1.21 children per woman (Ginsborg 2003). This demographic trend has led some experts to conclude that 'the population structure of Italy will come to resemble an inverted pyramid, with an ever smaller cohort of youth at the bottom, and a mass of old people at the top' (Ginsborg 2003: 70).

The reasons for this new reproductive pattern are several and extended discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. In short, this pattern is the result of a complex mix of old and new family strategies, some of which derive from the retention of tradition in both the public and private spheres and some from modernisation forces. The former include 'the felt obligation to have children within marriage, the power of the family as an inter-generational collective, the state's disinterest in reproductive politics' (Ginsborg 2003: 74). The latter include important social changes that have contributed to transform women's role and position in Southern European societies. Also, as a result of the feminist movement, new cultural models have developed during the 1980s and 1990s with respect to women's attitudes towards family and work. Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s female cultural attitudes placed a higher priority on the needs of the family than on paid work, now women of the younger generations are no longer willing to give up their professional career and their economic autonomy. These wider changes have induced women to join the labour force in increasing numbers over the last three decades. However, this trend has been matched neither by an adequate development of an accessible and affordable social infrastructure nor by adjustments in the domestic sphere (Vaiou 1996: 67). Southern Europe is characterised by what can be called an 'imperfect transition to gender equality':

> Whilst since the 1970s young women have increasingly had access to education and careers, rejecting their traditionally allocated role of "non-working" wife and mother, this equalisation of opportunity (which in reality is far from fully achieved since in most careers and professions it is men who hold nearly all the powerful positions) has not been matched by equality within the domestic sphere. In other words career women are expected by their husbands and partners to fulfil most of the domestic roles of cooking, cleaning, child care and caring for elderly parents (King and Zontini 2000: 43).

Dina Vaiou (1996: 69) believes that, even though one cannot speak of a single model of the family across Southern Europe, there are shared characteristics that help us to differentiate it from its Northern European counterparts. She writes:

> Unlike the North, in Southern European countries the family has retained its role as productive unit in all sectors and branches of economic activity, where … small firms predominate. Families pull income together from a variety of sources and make it available to their members when they want to start a business, study or look for a job. Through traditions of owner occupation, housing is secured for all members, but additionally, family wealth is secured through property exploitation and building. Families provide security and assistance to their members, especially in times of unemployment, and they render services to children and to the sick, the old and the disabled. (Vaiou 1996: 68)

Whereas in Northern Europe it is the state, through the welfare system, that plays the role of safety net, in Southern Europe this function has been historically carried out by the family.

Italian families have been going through structural changes, which include the disappearance of the traditional extended family. However, it has been noted that, even though extended households are no longer common in Southern Europe, family members continue to live close to one another, maintaining important economic and emotional links. Vaiou (1996) goes as far as claiming that the traditional extended family has not entirely disappeared in Southern Europe but has simply modified (see also Ginsborg 2003):

> It persists in new forms, where, for example, elderly parents and children's family may not share the same house but choose to live close to each other and share domestic and caring responsibilities: the elderly (more specifically grandmothers) look after young children and housekeeping, their daughters (or daughters-in-law) look after them when they need care. (Vaiou cited in Sabaté-Martinez 1996: 276)

What strikes many observers of Italian society is the importance attributed to the family, its supposed stability and cohesion. Italy has recently been described as having a distinctive pattern of personal relationships and social networks in respect to other European societies characterized by a particularly strong intergenerational solidarity. In a social survey comparing seven countries, Janet Finch concluded that:

> To Italians, relationships with both relatives and friends form a much more integral part of daily life than elsewhere. They are more likely to share a home with their relatives and also to have relatives living nearby. They are more likely to visit or telephone relatives daily and also to be in daily contact with a 'best friend'. Relationships between parents and children seem particularly important. (Finch 1989: 101)

However, Vaiou stresses, the family 'protective net' goes hand-in-hand with the persistence of prescriptive behavior, rights and duties (1996: 68). Within the family it is women who are responsible for domestic and caring work, whether or not they are also involved with paid work outside the home. As Ginsborg (2003: 76) puts it, 'intense and prosperous family relationships … [can] certainly be founts of great devotion and unity, but also of suffocation and oppression'.

Italian families in the UK

The literature on Italians in the UK is scant compared with other locations of the Italian diaspora such as the US, Australia, Canada and Latin America. The studies that exist describe a group highly fragmented and heterogeneous with a long and complex migration history to Britain (Fortier 2000; Palmer 1977; Sponza 1988). The majority of available studies have an historical nature. They describe the evolution and characteristics of the Italian migration to the UK and trace the formation of the first Italian communities (Colpi 1991; Marin 1975; Sponza 1988). These studies tend to identify different major phases of Italian immigration. These vary from author to author but, following Tubito and King, can be summarized as follows:

> A small-scale arrival of elite migrants, lasting from the Middle Ages until the 19th century; the first mass migration of much poorer Italians during the late 19th and early 20th centuries; a second, more concentrated, mass arrival during the 1950s and 1960s; and finally a return to the elite class with the to-and-fro movement of professionals, business migrants and students in the 1980s and 1990s. (Tubito and King 1996: 6)

Most attention in the literature has been given to the second phase (see above all Sponza 1988) centering on what Colpi has defined the 'old community', fewer studies have documented the largest post-war phase and virtually no study has considered the most recent post 1970s professional immigration. The pre-war period was the time when impoverished Northern Italian peasants started to migrate to London. They were initially itinerant workers engaged in a variety of activities ranging from street music to semiskilled and skilled crafts work. The most notable craftsmen of this period were the figurinai (makers and sellers of small statuettes), the arrotini (knife-grinders) and terrazzo workers (mosaic workers) (Colpi 1991: 40). Soon Italians started to move into the catering sector, first still as itinerant workers selling chestnuts in winter and ice-cream in summer, then as owners of small family businesses with which they gained a certain degree of success. They also started to move out from London seizing opportunities to open up their business throughout the country. This phase came to a traumatic end with the beginning of the Second World War, and the closure of several Italian business and the internment of hundreds of Italians as suspected enemies of war (Colpi 1991; Palmer 1977).

A new type of Italian migration resumed after the end of the war. These new migrants were no longer originating from the mountainous regions of the North but rather from the most deprived areas of the South. Contrary to their predecessors, they did not come through chain migration but arrived through labour recruiting schemes set up by British firms in collaboration with the Italian government in order to cover areas of labour shortage (Colucci 2002; King 1977; Tubito and King 1996). Rather than joining their predecessors in London and in the other areas of old 'little Italys' such as Manchester or Edinburgh, these new migrants settled near their new work places, in medium sized industrial towns such as Bedford, Peterborough, Loughborough, Bletchley, Nottingham, Coventry, Sheffield and in the South Wales steel towns (Tubito and King 1996). Much of the social scientific literature on this phase of Italian immigration has focused on a single case, that of Bedford (Cavallaro 1981; Colpi 1993; King 1977; King and King 1977).

Bedford's first Italians arrived in the city in 1951, recruited from a center near Naples by the London Brick Company (Colucci 2002; King 1977; King and King 1977). By the late 1970s they were

estimated at 8,000 people representing the largest immigrant group in the city and 10% of the Bedford population. Newly arrived Italian men started on four-year contracts in the brick industry and initially lived in hostels set up by their employer. Gradually they moved to rented properties near the town centre and were joined by their families. Men often continued to work in the brick industry but some moved to less strenuous blue-collar jobs or opened small shops. From the beginning, women had a high rate of labour market participation. They worked in hospitals, domestic service, and food and electronic industries. In the 1970s, the sweet company Meltis alone employed 600 Italian women in Bedford (King 1977; King and King 1977). Through hard work and frugal lives, many Italians managed to accumulate some savings and acquired their own homes. Even though Italian migration to Bedford was initiated by impersonal labour recruitment schemes it was quite clustered, with the majority of Italians originating from only four Southern Italian villages (Busso in Molise, Montefalcione in Campania, Buonvicino in Calabria, and S. Angelo Muxaro in Sicily). After the closure of the Naples recruitment centre in 1957, the London Brick Company continued to recruit Italians through their workers' personal networks, therefore favouring chain migration (King 1977).

An almost identical, but much less studied, pattern of settlement happened in Peterborough, which today counts the third largest Italian community after London and Bedford. Here too, Italians were recruited to work in the brick industry by the London Brick Company. Tubito and King (1996) describe today's Peterborough Italians as economically integrated but socially encapsulated. The first generation especially does not appear to have mixed much either with the English population or with other immigrant groups (Tubito and King 1996). Several authors have noted the differences between the older Italian communities and more recent arrivals originating from remote rural areas of Southern Italy. The latter are described as particularly attached to their own traditions, living their lives confined within the family, their village group and the Church. Their support networks appear strong but their social interactions rarely extend beyond kin members and co-villagers (Cavallaro 1981; Colpi 1991; King 1977; Tubito and King 1996).

An aspect noted and researched by authors such as Palmer (who worked on the 'old community' and King (who worked on the 'new community') is the close relationship that Italians maintain with Italy, and more specifically with their village of origin. Interestingly no authors have looked again at these phenomena in the light of the recent literature on transnationalism. King (1988) has noted that, for many Italian migrants, their frame of reference remained home-oriented. Even after several years abroad they maintained strong links with their villages of origin, usually in the form of regular phone calls, letters and above all visits. King (1988) describes the importance of the summer holidays both for the migrants and their villages. This is the time when extended families get reconstituted, single male migrants look for brides and local feasts are celebrated. In the 1970s and 1980s, connections were reinforced also by the regular sending of substantial remittances home. With the improved economic situation in Italy this may be less the case today. Many retain contacts in the hope of an imminent return. For the majority, permanent return will remain a myth but flows of return migrants have always been a regular feature of Italian emigration (King 1988). King has studied the process of return migration in depth. The UK is linked by return especially to Emilia and to a number of regions on the west side of the country from Piedmont to Campania and Sicily. King found that if the reasons for emigration were primarily economic, the reasons behind return were less clear cut and often involved 'family issues'. Amongst the most common ones were: 'the desire to rejoin parents and other family members (often this is more in the nature of an obligation than a desire), problems of migrants' schooling abroad, the wish to have children

educated in the Italian school system' (King 1988: 82). This was even more marked for female migrants, signalling their stronger obligation to deal with the wellbeing of their children and elderly relatives.

Return migration is not free of problems. Often family obligations push migrants to return before they have secured a good job at their destination forcing them to rely on their hard-earned savings for their everyday expenses. King (1988) also mentions the difficulties of returnee children who end up having problems both in the foreign education system and in the Italian one. Some of Tubito and King's (1996) returnees to Southern Italy could not cope and have re-emigrated back to Peterborough, from where they had returned. Others continue to live in Italy with the nostalgia of their previous life in Peterborough. The most successful migrants solve this perennial tension between a desire to be in England and in Italy by resorting to circular migration. This is what a minority of the Emilians studied by Palmer (1977) had achieved. They spent six months in Italy and six months in London where their children and grandchildren continued to live.

Even though no study has specifically focused on British-Italian families, family relationships and the nature of 'the Italian family' are discussed in several of the existing studies and often explained as central characteristics of Italian ethnicity. In this literature, what seems to distinguish Italians both from other immigrant groups and from the majority population is the specific role and characteristics attributed to the family. According to Fortier (2000: 61), the literature on Italians in the UK associates the Italian family 'with "traditional" values that no longer have the same currency within the dominant "host" culture'. One example of this position is Colpi who describes the Italian family in the following way:

> The most important unit, basic to the way of life and the structure of the Community, is the family. Although individualism is the mark of Italianism, the family is the very core of the Community … While particularly important for the new immigrants, the family ethic nevertheless still holds considerable sway amongst the 'old' settlers and their descendants who are more family conscious than the population at large (Colpi 1991: 191).

One problem with this literature is that it can inadvertently contribute to fixed and monolithic images of the Italian family. In spite of the commonality just described, there are important differences in the way authors interpret the role of 'the British-Italian family' which, in my view, reflect the more complex nature and diversity of Italian families. For instance, whereas some seem to see British-Italian families as harmonious cooperative units, others note the power inequalities that divide them. Also, whereas for some, families are the basic units from which wider relations of cooperation and solidarity are built, for others they represent the limit of associative life and integration.

For authors such as Palmer (1977) and Colpi (1991), the strong reciprocal links between kin members explain the very form and specificity of Italian migration. In their view, such links help explain 'chain migration', 'a process whereby families from particular villages or regions move to a new country or to a city, from which they instigate a 'chain migration' by assisting their relatives to

join them' (Colpi 1991:19). This mechanism helps explain the way in which entire villages have migrated to specific locations throughout the UK (and elsewhere)[4].

Italian family values and norms have also been used to explain the particular insertion and success of Italians in the catering trade. It is believed that Italians have been able to open ethnic stores, restaurants, coffee shops and ice-cream bars thanks to the cohesion of their families. As Palmer (1977: 251) explains, 'their production is only made possible by the mobilization of family labour, with everyone working long hours'. For Colpi (1991), these Italians have been successful in trading on their ethnicity, not only by selling 'ethnic' products but also by turning specific family values into economic success.

Bottignolo (1985) sees Italian families as favouring inter-generational cohesion. He is among those authors who see British-Italian families as largely harmonious units. In his study of Italians in the Bristol area, he noted little intergenerational conflict and attributed the lack of such conflict and the tightness of family ties to the 'gratifying and qualifying environment of the immigrant family group' (1985: 196).

> … Italian immigrants perceive the role of the family differently from the way English people do. In the Italian immigrant family, individual interests are merged in the general interest of the family group. All members put their efforts in the service of the family and when one starts thinking of getting out (usually by marrying) all the members of the family contribute in order to help him or her settle. (Bottignolo 1985: 194)

Cavallaro (1981) shares Bottignolo's view of the importance of cohesive families for Italian immigrants in the UK. In his view, the family allowed immigrants (in his case Calabrians in Bedford) to affirm the cultural values of their group. What distinguishes his analysis from that of Bottignolo, however, is that whereas the latter derives the strength of the British-Italian family from its 'gratifying and qualifying environment', for Cavallaro such strength results from its function as a 'buffer-zone' operating between the individual and the inhospitable immigration society (1981: 71). Cavallaro also acknowledged that the norms of reciprocity and solidarity that exist in the Calabrian nuclear family are based on relationships among members that are asymmetric. The father still maintains the power of a patriarch who has to be respected and obeyed by his children. He noted how children were prevented from breaking away from the family by a debt of gratitude that they felt for the 'sacrifice' that their parents (especially the father) had endured for their benefit.

Bottignolo (1985: 78) noted how 'a variety of personal relations often over and above the kinship type' were of 'considerable importance' for Italian immigrants in Bristol. For Cavallaro (1981), in contrast, solidarity and trust operated only within families. Even though he admits that Calabrians are involved in forms of reciprocity such as the exchange of produce from their allotments and help with repairing tasks, he sees these forms of solidarity and trust among people with a common origin as declining. In his view, in the immigration context, social relationships have become increasingly more competitive resulting in Calabrians being less willing to engage in exchanges outside their close-knit families. In line with the Italian literature on 'amoral familism', Cavallaro's conclusion is that:

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[4] As we have seen this is not the only mechanism by which Italians reached the UK; recruitment schemes also played an important role.

The compactness of the family microcosm, its size, the strong values of group cohesion, are obstacles against the birth and development of associations. (Cavallaro 1981: 115)

Whereas Bottignolo describes the lack of intergenerational conflict in Italian families, Colpi (1991) entitles one section of her book on Italians in the UK: 'Conflict'. In that section she describes the tensions that, during the 1960s and 1970s, started to emerge between parents and children over contrasting values. She notes how, during this time, the family was not a tightly knit economic unit any more, and women and children had gained considerable power vis-a-vis their father. Second-generation children:

on the one hand strove to be independent and accepted by their English peers but, on the other, they had been molded to accept the wishes of their parents and desired to maintain the good name of their family. (Colpi 1991: 202)

Chistolini (1986) too, in her study of Italo-Scottish women, notes the latent conflicts between the values that young Scottish women of Italian origin learned at school and those transmitted in their families. Both Colpi and Chistolini observe that these young people rarely rebelled openly against their parents. The reason for their acceptance of imposed norms and behaviour is, according to Colpi, not the result of harmonious family relations but the effect of very strict social control exercised by both family and community, especially in small cities of large Italian immigration such as the Bedford area that she studied.

Both Chistolini (1986) and Colpi (1991) identify diversity in Italian family life. For them, such diversity seems primarily the result of different migration histories. Colpi, for instance, differentiates between the old and the new Italian communities (pre and post 1945 migration), whereas Chistolini distinguishes between those families in which women migrated around the 1960s and contemporary migrations. Yet both authors also stress common characteristics among Italian families. In Chistolini's view, women are generally those responsible for creating and maintaining the cohesion, solidarity and unity of the family. Women are involved in paid-work outside the home but their extra domestic activity is seen as always functional to the needs of the family. The links across the generations are considered still very strong and married children, when they leave the parental house, are described as settling nearby and maintaining regular inter-household contacts with their kin. For Colpi (1991), second-generation families tend to retain several of what she calls 'traditional patterns'. Such patterns include the separation of roles between husband and wife; strong relationships with same-sex kin; maintenance of face-to-face contact with first generation parents; and reliance on the many services that the family network can offer:

These include a considerable amount of financial help from both sets of parents in the early days of marriage, practical as well as economic help when the third generation emerges, and provision of certain ethnic items such as homemade wine, where the relevant manufacturing skills have not generally been acquired by the second generation. (Colpi 1991: 207)

Gender is one of the central themes of the two most recent books on Italians in the UK, namely Anne-Marie Fortier's (2000) Migrant Belongings and Azadeh Medaglia's (2001) Patriarchal Structures and Ethnicity in the Italian Community in Britain. In spite of their different topics and

methodologies, these two books seem to have an element in common. They both provide a picture of Italian women in the UK as resistant to change, victimized by patriarchal power, deeply religious and anchored to their traditions. Such picture contrasts with the accounts of the changing and complex roles and positions of Italian women in Italy, as Medaglia herself recognizes. It could be argued that immigrant communities retain traditional values and norms more strongly than the societies from where they originated, thus explaining a rigid conservation of a specific gender order. This is partly true. However, both Fortier's (2000) and Medaglia's (2001) accounts very much resemble the kind of descriptions that have dominated the mainstream migration literature for decades and which have been long criticized by feminist scholars. In such accounts, women were described as traditional, passive, subordinated to male migrants, and limited by their culture (for a critique of these views see for instance Bujis 1993; Morokvasic 1983, 1984; Phizacklea 1983). Very similar discourses are applied today to Muslim women. My previous study on Moroccan women in Italy and Spain proved the inadequacy of those widespread descriptions that saw them only as passive victims oppressed by their fundamentalist and traditionalist men (Zontini 2002). The same can be said about Italian women. Studies on Italian women in other geographical contexts (Gabaccia and Iacovetta 2002; Vasta 1993) point to the more complex role and position of Italian women in their families and immigrant communities. As Vasta argues (1993: 100):

> Italian migrant women's multiple identities as working women, migrant women, wives, mothers and so on do not remain static, ensuring that they do not only determine as much as possible their own cultural-political traditions but that they also engage in their own "cultures of resistance".

In spite of their feminist agendas, studies such as those by Fortier and Medaglia tend to reproduce, rather than challenge, stereotypical and monolithic images about Italian women.

In the literature on Italians in the UK there is some attention to rituals but no empirical study documenting them in depth and exploring, for instance, their meaning for the actors involved. Several authors stress the importance of life-cycle rituals as markers of Italian specificity. From Cavallaro (1981) we learn that the wedding represents the main ritual for Calabrians in Bedford, which serves to strengthen the traditional values of the group and to reactivate them. In his view, it can be seen as a celebration that represents the maximum level of group cohesion. It is the way in which Italian immigrants can signal their social prestige as well as economic success. To this end, they organize large and expensive ceremonies to which up to 600 people can be invited. Processes of reciprocity among groups revolve around this event, gifts are exchanged and specific ties are strengthened. Colpi (1991) too sees marriage as the most important life-cycle event for Italian families in the UK, especially for post 1945 immigrants. Weddings represent the main opportunities for families and paesani[5] scattered around the UK to gather and stay in touch. Weddings are also one of the few social events for Italian women (Chistolini 1986: 115). Other important life-cycle events are christenings, first communions, confirmations and funerals. Fortier (2000) analyses the rite of the first communion. This rite too, like the wedding, is described as an enactment of ethnic difference and as an occasion for creating continuity for dispersed and fragmented families. It is also, in Fortier's view, a rite that constructs particular kinds of gendered and generational subjects. The ceremony of young boys dressed in dark suits and young women in white dresses serves as a rehearsal of a wedding ceremony: 'Dressed in white which symbolizes

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[5] People from the same village.

purity female first communicants are preparing for womanhood, marriage and the sacrifice of virginity' (Fortier 2000: 152). Fortier believes that both the first communion and the wedding are important rites that serve for the enactment of intergenerational responsibility. However, Fortier's analysis of the first communion, with her focus on the symbolic meaning of the public ritual and her emphasis on continuity, does not help us to understand the more subjective and differentiated interpretations of the ritual. For instance, we do not know how this rite has changed meaning with the emergence of the second and third generations, or what importance and value young Italians (and their families) still place on such ritual.

Colpi identifies a specific problem facing the second-generation family, namely the ageing of the first-generation parents and their care. A potential difficulty that Colpi identifies but does not explore, is the wish (often accomplished) of the parents to retire back to Italy. Marin (1975) too, writing in the early 1970s, identified elderly care for Italian immigrants as one of the main future problems of the British-Italian community. However, the ways in which elderly care, and care more generally, is provided across Italy and the UK seems to have been little studied. This lack of attention is surprising given the fact that the issue of care for the young and the elderly is now a highly debated and researched topic in contemporary Italy. In Italy, given the inadequate state provisions for both the young and the elderly, and the changes in family structures, it seems that immigrant women are those who have taken up the bulk of caring tasks, thus freeing Italian female family members from what until very recently used to be their obligations (Andall 2000; King and Zontini 2000; Zontini 2002).

Given the few studies available (most of which are also dated) and their tendency to reproduce rather than challenge stereotypical images of Italians and their families, there is scope for new research that focuses on diversity rather than homogeneity, and places Italian experiences in a contextual and comparative perspective.


Conclusion

This paper has located the literature on Italians in the UK within broader debates on social capital, ethnicity and transnationalism. Using Italians as an example, I drew attention to social capital theories problematic consideration of mobility; their ambivalence between criticizing and praising strong family networks, and their general neglect of power dynamics within families and groups, especially along gender and generational lines. I highlighted the relevance of theories of transnationalism to interpret the experience of Italian migrants, stressing the importance of considering networks of trust and reciprocity that may extend beyond geographical boundaries. In this respect, I drew attention to kin and caring work as two ways in which social capital may be produced or maintained within and across families in a transnational context. The paper also started dispelling some stereotypical assumptions about Italian families by describing the complexity and heterogeneity of Italian migration to the UK. Rather than assuming a model of Italian family that may favour or hinder social capital, further research is needed documenting both continuity and change with past practices and traditions for Italian families which are differentiated by migration experience, generation, class, regional origin, political orientation, etc.

It is obvious from this review and discussion of the available literature that there are a number of questions that need to be answered about families of Italian heritage in Britain.  Some of these

questions are: how are family space, networks and ties maintained, reproduced, and by whom?, what is the role of household and family rituals in these processes?, who are the individuals and groups thought to be 'family' and what mutual obligations and opportunities derive from such auto- and communal-recognition?, how are care and provision organised and reciprocated within and across families and communities?, what social networks do families of Italian backgrounds in Britain initiate and develop outside their families and immediate communities (campanilistic, ethnic, work based, etc.)?, and what are the circumstances in which ethnicity may be activated as a source of social capital? Empirically based in depth analyses of the every-day experiences of British families of Italian heritage will contribute to address some of these questions.

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