

Family Life Courses of Older Caribbean Migrants Living in Canada

by

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Abstract

The multidimensional nature of family life can make navigating relationships across distance and time complex. As families become more mobile there is acknowledgment of a knowledge gap in understanding how family dynamics and bonds extend across borders. Issues of continuity and change within families become more salient to understanding how family members near and far navigate relationships and obligations across time. The focus of this study was to explore migrants' perspectives of their family life courses.

This qualitative descriptive study sought to ascertain older migrant perspectives on their family relationships across the life course. The study was guided by human ecology theory, social convoy model and concepts from life course perspective to facilitate understanding of the experiences of the older adults. The thematic findings from this study affirm the significance of family bonds, illustrating that: family relationships are negotiated across time; family relationships are enacted via various mechanisms; and ideas about families are redefined across time. The study results suggest that, in the face of a life event such as migration participants actively engaged in decision making about the family relationships that they nurture, new relationships that they create and those they would leave behind.

Keywords: Older adults, older migrants, family connections, family life course, family support, life course, Caribbean families

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Shanika Donalds. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “Linked Lives: Life Courses of family connections of older Caribbean Migrants living in Canada”, No. Pro00103481, January 4, 2021.

Dedication

To my parents, Kathlene and Lester who taught me the importance of family.

To Sean, my incredible husband, your unwavering support, and confidence in my ability to see this through kept me going more times than I can say.

To Sarah and Sage, my daughters, you give meaning to so much in my life.

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This doctoral journey was punctuated by many ups and downs, tears, laughter, and learnings along the way. I am grateful that through it all I was never alone, always surrounded by a community that helped me up when I faltered, celebrated each phase and who kept reminding me that I could do it.

A special thank you to my participants. Words cannot express my gratitude to you for taking the time to share your experiences with me. This dissertation would not have been possible without your stories.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Preface	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Tables	ix
List of Figures.....	x
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
The Current Study	3
Purpose of the study	5
Significance of the Research.....	6
Research Questions	7
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework	9
Human Ecology Theory– Family as a near environment.....	9
Life Course Perspective.....	11
Linked Lives	12
Trajectories & Transitions	16
Social Convoy Model.....	17
Summary.....	20
Chapter 3: Literature Review.....	21
Transnational Families	21
Transnational Family Life	24
Caribbean Migration	29
Caribbean Families – Connections and Support Practices	32
Summary.....	35
Chapter 4: Methodology.....	37
Philosophical Underpinnings.....	38
Research Design.....	39
Qualitative Descriptive Design	39
Context of the Study	40

Participants.....	41
Data Collection	42
Recruitment Strategy	42
Ethics	42
Informed Consent.....	43
Interviews.....	44
Data Analysis	46
Thematic Analysis.....	48
Rigor.....	51
Researcher’s Narrative	52
Summary.....	55
Chapter 5: Results	56
Participant Information and Demographic Summary	56
Participants’ Profiles	58
Findings	61
Theme 1: Choosing Relationships.....	62
i. Relationships are based in agency and obligation.....	62
ii. Contact signals relationship importance	70
Theme 2: Receiving and providing support.....	73
i. Support is received, but only by some.....	73
ii. Support is provided, but under certain conditions	77
Theme 3: (Re)-creating family.....	83
i. Family composition changes.....	84
ii. Understandings of family changes.....	87
Chapter 6: Discussion, Implications and Conclusions	91
Choices and obligations in family relationships	92
Paying dues and reaping benefits in families.....	95
Shifting boundaries around ‘who is family’	98
Summary.....	100
Implications	101
Practice Implications	102
Policy Implications.....	103
Research Implications	104
Concluding observations and reflections.....	105

References 108

Appendices 136

 Appendix A – Letter to Participants..... 137

 Appendix B – Informed Consent 139

 Appendix C – Interview Guide 140

 Appendix D – Demographic Questionnaire 141

List of Tables

Table 1: Research Participants.....	57
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List of Figures

Figure 1: Themes showing Family Relationships, Support and Membership Across Time61

Chapter 1: Introduction

Desiree first came to Canada in 1969. She was a young, single Afro Caribbean woman in her late teens who wanted to pursue post secondary studies. She came to Canada for University with no solid plans about what she would do thereafter. At the time, Desiree was cognizant of the many sacrifices that had been made by her parents to enable her in Canada. She knew she had to work hard, do well in school, and be frugal with the little money she was able to earn. She wanted her parents to come and see where she was and for them to see that she was okay. As she recalls, “many people left back then, and no one heard what happened to them”. Desiree has been in Canada now for 24 years, having moved back to the Caribbean and then returning with her young children to settle permanently. Her children are now adults, and her story highlighted the ways in which her family and like-family connections have been a source of strength for her, helping her to navigate challenges, celebrate successes and keeping her connected to people and things that matter to her across time. On the day of our meeting, Desiree said that she had just received a package from her sister. As she shared her story she talked about how, over time, she had grown closer to her siblings but also about how the relationships among them were initially distant as “she was dealing with her life, and they were dealing with theirs”. Throughout her story Desiree emphasized the importance of her family and the nature of these relationships including incorporating people beyond those with kinship ties.

This thesis is about families. It addresses the contested notion that there is a singular family. Dorothy Smith, a Canadian academic, coined the term Standard North American Family (SNAF) (Smith, 1993). This family was described as a legally married couple sharing a

household who may be parents of children who live with them. She saw the SNAF as an ideological code that located families as ‘normative’ or ‘intact’, while others were ‘defective’ and hence marginalized. The SNAF also froze families in time in households with young children. Terms like SNAF and nuclear families continue to guide policies and interventions aimed at supporting families, however they do not acknowledge the variety of ways that people do, are in and navigate families and family relationships.

This diversity of families has been recognized as part of the 30th celebration of the International Year of the Family, with the UN General Assembly describing families as diverse in needs and expectations, marking a shift toward inclusion and reflecting the mission of the Sustainable Development Goals to leave no one behind. In Canada, the Vanier Institute of the Family has framed its approach to understanding families around creating knowledge of family diversities and a calling for the systematic examination of these diversities (Keating et al., nd).

It is against this backdrop that this study was conducted. Its purpose is to contribute to knowledge about family diversity in Canada. Its focus is on migrants, a group that, in the most recent census, accounted for 23% of Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2023). In concert with this increase in the migrant population, in 2022 older persons (65 years or older) accounted for 19% of the Canadian population, of which 30% of this group is foreign born. There is evidence that older migrants are lonelier than non-migrants (Albert, 2021; de Jong Gierveld et al., 2015). Families are given prominence in social, economic and cultural discourse about care and support of older adults. Yet, we know relatively little about who is available in the lives of older adults should the need for support arise. So, family lives of older immigrants provide a useful context to examine of family relationships across time. This examination will provide a window into the

diversity of families, highlighting the ebbs and flows of family relationships and how these are constructed and reconstructed, reflecting their changing nature and resilience across time.

The Current Study

Whether existing within the same geographical space or across distance, families are defined by relationships among members and the ebb and flow of interactions among them (Herrera-Lima, 2001). Families are created, recreated and maintained as people experience a variety of life experiences. Family practices and relationships are subject to change and are being negotiated over the life course, enabling members to meet individual and collective needs (Hofferth & Goldscheider, 2016; MacMillian & Copher, 2005).

As family life unfolds over the life course, this unfolding is marked by transitions in family relationships, roles and contexts. Events and transitions over time can reshape, test, or strengthen family dynamics, including interactions among, and roles and responsibilities of members. This may result in shifting relationships, ideas of dependency, obligations and commitments within families. Attention needs to be given to what these mean for the tangible things that family members do for one another and the meanings, understanding, and ideas of obligations that are embedded in the process of doing family overtime.

For persons who experience migration¹, family processes can be disrupted in ways we do not fully understand, resulting in reorganization of roles and ways of interacting, reallocation of resources, and redefining engagement with the contexts within which family members exist (Cerrutti & Massey, 2001; Miranda et al., 2005). Like other family relationships, transnational family ties facilitate support, cultural identity, and social adjustment (Chamberlain, 1999), and

¹ The term migration is used throughout this dissertation to acknowledge the movement of participants across borders from the Caribbean to Canada (International Migration Organization, 2023). It is this shift from one country to another that was the transition of interest and that prompted their process of creating and recreating their family life courses.

can also entail challenges and conflict (Heymann et al, 2009). Like other families, they are constantly engaged in the process of doing and becoming (Finch, 2007).

Family relationships vary across the life course of migrants, resulting in changing commitments and intensity of engagement (Kobayashi & Preston, 2007). Exploring family life across borders can provide insights into how migrants and their families shift or deepen family practices to support each other (Pries, 2007). Research on transnational families has illustrated the challenges of distance in organization and negotiation of family practices (Baldassar & Merla, 2014). Out of these studies we have gained a better understanding of transnational family ties and the ways in which these are maintained by diverse migrants, as well as strategies migrants use to meet family responsibilities and commitments. Whether through visits (Baldassar, 2008), remittances (De Haas, 2005; Horn, 2017a; Remy & Ndione, 2019) or virtual co-presence (Şenyürekli & Detzner, 2009), many migrants continue to maintain ties with families.

In this project, migration is viewed as a transition that results in disruptions in both proximity and relationships among members of one's family. It thus provides a window into understanding how transitions can shape family life course trajectories (Hagestad & Settersten 2017; Settersten, 2018). In doing so, we are able to apply a life course lens to this fairly common family experience and examine the different kinds of processes and assumptions which impact family relationships following this transition in the life of older adults. As a life course transition, migration may prompt people to think about how and with whom they remain connected (MacMillian & Copher, 2005). People's lives are interdependent, therefore a transition such as migration may influence family relationships because family members are a part of the shared

migratory experience (Mayer, 2009; Walther et al., 2022). Consequently, a major life event like migration can be a turning point for family members and the relationships among them.

Migration continues to transform families globally. During the migration process, families make decisions that impact many aspects of family life, including care for young children or older family members left behind as well as navigating other responsibilities. Scholars have provided evidence of the ways that support exchanges serve to help not only the family members in the home country but also migrants in the post-immigration period (Horn, 2017b). The sending of “care” through remittances has been studied and the impact of remittances has been documented in the migration literature for regions such as Latin America and the Caribbean (see International Migration Organization[IMO], 2010; Orozco, 2002). However, to date much of this exploration has been one sided, exploring the impact on the families left behind, and the economic and social development of migrants’ home countries (Hernandez & Bibler Coutin, 2006). Explorations of the South-North flow of support has been largely understudied.

Although there is significant scholarship exploring the lives of migrants and their families, little of this research examines family connections and support across the life course and the role of these connections in the lives of migrants over time.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to better understand how a group of older adults in Canada who are migrants have constructed their family life course. It examined the experiences of older Caribbean migrants’ connections and support exchanges with their families, how they sustained, reinforced or distanced themselves from familial bonds, and how they cultivated family relationships across time.

Significance of the Research

Families are dynamic, and their relationships are characterized by reciprocal and interdependent relationships that support individual members and the wider family unit (Henry et al. 2015). There is modest evidence that many migrants continue to find ways to (re)establish and maintain contacts with a wide range of connections and remain active and involved members of their family networks. Traditionally, migration was seen as a process that separated families and created detachment (Glick, 2010). However, contemporary migration studies have shown that migrants continue to maintain family ties, social networks and relationships for many years post-migration (De Haas, 2010; Mazzucato & Schans, 2011). Reynolds and Zontini (2007) contend that “rather than fragmenting or disintegrating as a result of migration, family relationships simply transform and are reconstituted in new forms” (p. 226). Critical questions remain about how family relationships and support intersect and are experienced by people who leave their country of birth.

Developing a more nuanced understanding of diverse families, their processes and practices has the potential to benefit migrants, their families in the home countries, and destination societies. How migrants and their families are supported as they transition into the new country and navigate simultaneity of migrant life has implications and can either position the migrant and their families for success or hardships. Feminist scholars such as Morokvasic (1984), have argued that how migration impacts the lives of people needs to be examined beyond purely economic and neo-classic push and pull factors, and that the discussion should also include issues such as family relationships and broken relationships. Acknowledging migration and family life underscores the importance of the multi-dimensional nature of lives of people who experience this transition (Collins, 2000; Few-Demo, 2014).

Migration policy has often regarded families as ties that correspond with the nuclear family structure so that spouses, parents and children are considered the significant relations. This is a limited view of family and ignores cultural differences in the definition and enactment of family relationships, and the role of extended and like-family relations. As we see the emergence of new household structures and family forms, there is acknowledgement that household does not equal family. However, the concept of household as family continues to guide the data we collect about families, which in turn influences the development and implementation of many policies and intervention strategies that impact families and how they are enabled or stymied in discharging their responsibilities.

In order to better understand family relationships following a migration transition, this thesis explores the family life courses of older Caribbean migrants living in Edmonton, Alberta. It is a story of family life and how family relationships are transformed, lost, renewed and recreated across time. Through the accounts of the study participants, I illustrate that families are at times sources of support, family relationships are redefined, and that support and connections intersect and change over the life of participants. In doing so, I provide a better understanding of families over time including the factors that shape understandings of who is family.

Research Questions

Migration can be a physically, socially, emotionally and culturally disconnecting process for migrants and their families. As people embark on their lives in the new country, they sometimes experience simultaneity – living in one context while retaining strong linkages in another (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004). As a result, migrants and their families are sometimes embedded in complex intra- and inter-generational relationships which transcend borders.

Research about how people construct family relationships across time remains underdeveloped.

This study was guided by the research questions:

- How do older Caribbean migrants describe their experiences of connections across the family life course?
- How does support given and support received shape family relationships?
- How does family meaning evolve across the life course?

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

In this chapter I present the sensitizing framework for exploring the experiences of older Caribbean migrants and their relationships with family members over time. Charmaz (2003) describes sensitizing frameworks as those background ideas that together inform the researcher's orientation to the research problem. She explains that:

“sensitizing concepts offer ways of seeing, organizing, and understanding experience: they are embedded in our disciplinary emphases and perspectival proclivities. Although sensitizing concepts may deepen perception, they provide starting points for building analysis, not ending points for evading it.” (p. 259)

This study is underpinned by Human Ecology Theory (HET) and life course perspective concepts of linked lives, transitions, and trajectories as well as the social convoy model.

A core assumption is that people are embedded in contexts that influence their lives. Near environments are the main contexts of interest. In this study the focus is on the interactions that occur in near environment which is family. Within this near environment processes and patterns of reciprocal influences occur; resources are managed; and adaptations take place to attain outcomes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The theoretical framework provides a foundation for exploring family context over time through connections and support exchanges.

Human Ecology Theory– Family as a near environment

At the heart of Human Ecology Theory is an interest in individuals and the environments in which they exist. People are assumed to be inextricably linked to their environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, 2005). Therefore, Human Ecology Theory provides a lens for how

people can be understood within context, recognizing that multiple levels of context exist and they interact with and reinforce each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Richard et al., 2011). Human Ecology Theory assumes that i) people are active participants in shaping their environments; ii) contexts influence each other; and iii) and the relationship between people and their environment is dynamic.

Within this framework, an ecosystem consists of multiple interdependent levels that together influence the behaviour and development of the individual (Perry-Jenkins et al., 2013; Smith & Harmon, 2016; Tudge et al., 2009). Context is viewed as nested. Microsystems include the individual's immediate or near-environments such as families; the mesosystem comprises the relationships that exist among the microsystems; while the macrosystem consists of the overarching societal conditions, norms and values, political landscape and culture (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Smith & Harmon, 2016).

In this study the lens is on the near environment – those contexts that are immediate and close by. Families are a main element of near environments and comprise the disciplinary focus of my area of study which is Family Science (National Council on Family Relations [NCFR], 2023). Within family environments, processes and patterns of reciprocal influences occur; resources are managed; and adaptations take place (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

In this work I explored family as a context by examining older adults' perspectives on their relationships with family members over time. Within this near environment, interpersonal connections, family ties and special rites and rituals serve as a point of reference for members (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). These relationships reflect patterns of reciprocal behaviours and exchanges that are embedded in the family network and the ebb and flow of family connections

over time. Human Ecology Theory helps us to focus on the interrelationships within families (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) grounded in the assumption that individuals do not exist in isolation but are interconnected with others within this context (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Human Ecology Theory therefore enables an examination of family relationships across time. By focusing on the person-environment (family) exchanges – family relationships - I can examine the ways that older adults in this study maintain and or recreate family across time.

Life Course Perspective

Life course perspective offers a lens for examining the relationships among social structures and the influence of time, history, and place on individual lives. The theory focuses on the way that individual lives develop according to developmental and age-specific patterns, including historical context, and social and political institutions. Life course theory also directs our attention to the timing of events as well as transitions in roles and status along the life journey (Elder et al., 2003). Fundamental to life course perspective is the assumption that people's lives change over time and are shaped by their age, social structures, and historical time (Elder & George, 2016; Jasso, 2003; Settersten, 2015).

Life course perspective is premised on the notion that human development involves expected and sometimes unexpected experiences, events, and changes in social roles over time. Consequently, the exploration of family relationships using a life course lens illuminates the ways in which a transition such as migration shapes and influences family life and relationships. A key assumption is that events and experiences have varying impacts on individuals depending on when they occur during the life course (George, 2009). Applying a life course lens to the study of family relationships and support exchanges enables an examination of the (i)

interrelations among older adults and their family members, and (ii) influence of individual paths of family members in relation to their family and the wider social environment.

For my research I used the life course principles of linked lives, trajectories and transitions to guide the exploration of family relationships, and how together they comprise the family life course of older Caribbean migrants. After a brief discussion of each concept, I explain their applicability to the understanding of migrants' family connections across time.

Linked Lives

The principle of linked lives assumes that lives are interdependent and social relationships are interconnected (Carr, 2018). These relationships in an individual's network can impact individual choice and options, as changes in one person's life can lead to changes in the lives of their significant others and vice versa (Carr, 2018; Elder et al., 2003).

Families represent one of the most intimate and enduring social contexts of an individual's life. Individuals vary in how and the extent to which they maintain family relationships across time, notwithstanding migration, and these relationships are shaped by social norms and institutions as well as life events. Relationships with family members may be interrupted and severed depending on life events and circumstances (Elder et al., 2003; Hagestad & Settersten, 2017).

Settersten (2018) cautions that simply acknowledging that lives are linked is not enough as this does not "reveal how they are linked, for how long, for what purpose, or with what consequences" (p. 27). It is therefore important to understand how family life courses of migrants evolve over time, are embedded in long term pathways, and are "punctuated by and enmeshed with other people" (Settersten, 2015, p. 217). People make decisions that have an impact on others, and this necessitates that we "align our lives" (Settersten, 2015, p. 222).

Through support exchanges, family members are bound to each other by the decisions and events

in the life course of members. For example, migrating does not immediately absolve children of their responsibilities to their parents, and not attending to these responsibilities may be frowned upon by peers and other family members in both the home country and the new country.

However, the ability to provide care for elderly parents across borders can be impacted by many factors, including the status of the parent-child relationship prior to migration. Therefore, an examination of how lives are linked across time is not simply contingent on kinship ties but the quality of those ties, the investments that have been made in them, and how these ties are influenced by the interplay of social structures and individual agency.

Another aspect of linked lives is the ways that people are linked across and within generations (Alwin, 2012). Choices that one family member makes can affect the outcomes for others. Empirical research shows, for example, that monies sent by migrants to family members left behind are integral for providing access to otherwise unaffordable resources (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). Other forms of support, such as childcare by the family members in the home countries can be useful in providing migrants a transition period where they are able to establish themselves in the new country without their children (Pottinger, 2005; Pottinger, et al., 2009). Migrants' transition to the new country may affect the life circumstances of families left behind in a direct way (Edmonston, 2013), for example in a situation in which a family member takes on the responsibility for migrant's children. The principle of linked lives focuses attention on how major transitions in the life of one family member can impact the lives of others. Researchers suggest that, regardless of whether migration is a family decision, the fortunes and challenges that are experienced by the migrant are also borne by the wider family unit (Bryerson & Vuorela, 2002).

As we consider how the lives of migrants and their families are linked over time, we should also pay attention to the different ways in which migration can influence the rethinking of family roles and relationships. Settersten (2018) has argued that it is not enough to say that people are linked. Explorations are needed to highlight the ways in which people are linked, and the various manifestations of these across the life journey (Settersten, 2018).

Migration may truncate or strengthen connections to other family members. There is evidence that families increase resources because of migration which can enable members to access better educational opportunities and health care (Findlay et al., 2015; Fog Olwig, 1999). On the other hand, migration experiences may exacerbate family challenges, as seen in cases of older adults caring for grandchildren (Zhang et al., 2016). We have yet to fully understand how migrants' and their families' lives are linked by the interactions and interdependence of relationships (Bailey & Mulder, 2017).

Within relationships there are normative obligations and commitments that may shift in the face of events such as migration, causing new relationships to be formed, but also ending, strengthening, or tempering existing ones. Settersten's (2018) work presents insightful conceptualizations of the ways in which people's lives are linked and in doing so he has begun to address a gap in the linked lives principle which is how family life courses are shaped by linkages among family members and how these linkages might change over time. To explore how people's lives are linked over time and what supports ongoing obligations and commitments I have included reciprocity to support the discussion on linked lives.

Reciprocity offers a base from which we can explore why and how family members maintain relationships. Molm and colleagues (2007) describe reciprocity as "the giving of benefits to another in return for benefits received" (p. 199). As people experience their family

relationships, they may modify their normative orientations and expectations about how and when exchanges occur and how they value them. Exchanges are also influenced by the extent to which the recipient feels cared about by the giver, and the extent to which there is perceived need for the resource provided (Ferrer et al., 2017; Keefe & Fancey, 2002). Through ongoing connections and support of each other, people indicate those relationships that are important in their lives.

Family members' willingness and ability to provide support can be impacted by the physical and emotional distance caused by migration, which can, in turn, affect family meaning. Baldassar's (2007a) research on transnational families and their support exchanges provides evidence that these families engage in care support that is pivotal for the wider family network's survival. Canadian scholars have argued that family commitment and responsibilities do not fade with migration but are sometimes reorganized to meet needs (Keefe & Fancey, 2002) Therefore, understanding the bonds that facilitate family ties after migration becomes increasingly relevant. Exploring reciprocity in family relationships allows for an exploration of support exchanges in families beyond the often-highlighted idea of family members in the home country being dependent on those who leave. This exploration expands the lens applied to understanding how the lives of families are linked through ongoing interactions and activities, which reinforce ideas of family to include the capacity and obligation to care for and care about each other across the life course.

Whether providing or receiving affection, resources, or help, reciprocity is fundamental to human relationships. Support exchanges within transnational families implies more than just the sending and receiving of tangible resources; there are various emotions and motivations tied to and resulting from exchanges. Using reciprocity as a lens for examining transnational family

support exchanges opens the space for discussing how ideas of family relationships are reconfigured and transformed in light of migration and family separation. Following the directions of Silverstein et al. (2006) to examine how lives are linked, one can explore interdependence with others by examining the history of the exchanges of older adults with their family members, as well as the meanings associated with exchanges among them.

Trajectories & Transitions

The concepts of trajectories and transitions are included to signpost additional ways of thinking about time. Trajectories are defined as long term patterns of stability and change (Settersten, 2003). Family trajectories are one of several life course domains, along with employment and care (Burton-Jeangros et al., 2015; Elder et al., 2003; Fast et al., 2020; Keating et al., 2019). Trajectories are influenced by the social roles that the individual undertakes at different points in the life course.

Trajectories are shaped by various life events, the timing of these events, and social expectations (Elder et al., 2003; Settersten, 2003). Expected and unexpected changes along any trajectory can alter its course. For example, migration may disrupt labour force engagement and reduce a migrant's ability to support family members financially.

Family trajectories are used here as a conceptual lens for exploring migrants' long-term path of support and connections with family members from the time of migration and into later life. Therefore, questions about how migration (re)shapes familial relationships and how these are navigated across distance become salient.

Trajectories are marked by multiple transitions across the life course. A transition is a shift in the person's status or role, often precipitated by a life event (Hutchinson, 2011; Settersten, 2018). The life event of interest in this study is migration. Like other transitions, migration may have cumulative impacts (O'Rand, 2009). Using transitions as a theoretical

concept enables the exploration of points of support across the migrant life course and how these may influence subsequent courses of action taken by the migrant and their family members.

Families are affected by the transitions that are a part of the migration process (Zimmerman et al., 2011). Migration can disrupt family processes by changing the dynamic of how a family works. These transitions are being navigated across borders and cultures, and, as Mazzucato (2013) cautions, any examination of these families must be mindful of this and should seek to acknowledge the cross-cutting influence of both the sending and receiving cultures. This point is supported by Morales and Jorba (2010), who found that migrants and their families embody several identities and roles that shape multiple generations of transnational family members.

Migration may be self-initiated, can impact the lives of others, or be brought on by changes in lives of significant others. For instance, when a parent migrates leaving behind small children, this action can impact the lives of the children as well as those who provide care for them. As people navigate family relationships across time post-migration, how these relationships evolve is dependent on their individual circumstances, prior relationships with family members, and resources available. Consequently, a transition such as migration can result in the increase or decrease in the intensity of family connections, and this may impact how the migrant is able to navigate other life transitions across time. The life course perspective allows us to link the individual to collective behaviour and timing of events (Settersten, 2018).

Social Convoy Model

Social convoys are another way of understanding how human relationships evolve over time (Antonucci et al., 2010). Across the life course, people develop, maintain, and lose relationships as they change roles and life trajectories become more diverse (Connidis & Barret,

2018). The construct of social convoy is based in an assumption that people are surrounded by others who support them and who move with them across the life course. Convoys allow for an exploration of how lives are linked across time. According to Williams and colleagues (2004), people yield benefits from long-term relationships with significant others whom they can contact when needed, and can depend on, over time. The social convoy model facilitates an understanding of the relationships that people create across the life course and the way that they navigate these (Antonucci & Wong, 2010; Antonucci et al., 2014). Additionally, the model enables the exploration of how social connections influence support exchanges as well as how these supports facilitate integration into networks (Antonucci et al., 2014).

The social convoy model enables the exploration of social relations beyond consideration of collective labels, such as family or friends, and facilitates an understanding of who these relationships are with, levels of interaction, and the contexts in which they occur. The model is useful to support the examination of migrants and their connections across the life course as it assumes a lifelong process of relationships and the potential changes in the number, variety and intensity. It is particularly useful for understanding the extent to which individuals, as they move through the life course, are surrounded by significant others to whom they give support and from whom they receive support.

Social convoys are conceptualized as nested circles around the individual. Those connections in the inner circle are the ones with whom individuals have the strongest relationships while those in most outer circles are weaker connections (Antonucci et al., 2010). The relationships in the inner circle are marked by closeness, high frequency of contact and quality interactions (Antonucci et al, 2014). By fostering, minimizing contacts with, or severing relationships, people shape the structure and function of their convoys, optimizing or (re)creating

relationships that are important to them (Lang et al., 2009). Individuals express agency over their convoys based on the desire to have connections and the ability to initiate and maintain them (de Jong Giervald & Fokkema, 2015). Migration potentially poses a threat to the maintenance of relationships as people are separated by distance and there can be difficulty in maintaining emotional and supportive connections. Migrants may therefore be at higher risk of experiencing loneliness especially in the initial period following the move to a new country, and particularly if they moved alone (Park et al., 2019).

Research exploring the networks of older adults by Cornwell and Laumann (2015) found that, over a five-year period, older American adults maintained all their close relationships and in fact, the majority added people to their networks of closest relationships. Those findings contrast research by Ajrouch and colleagues (2018) who, in their cross-national study, found that older American adults' social connections were more likely to contract when compared to older adults from other countries. Additionally, they found that network size and physical proximity varied by national context and that frequency of contact was dependent on closeness of the relationship (Ajrouch et al., 2018). Therefore, whether people have many or few social connections, the quality and frequency of contacts is an indication of closeness of the relationships.

Research has highlighted the benefits of social connections as they provide access to more supports leading to better mental and physical wellness in a person's life. Hornstein and Eisenbeger (2017) found that social support can act as a protective factor reducing personal fears, and the presence of a large social network reduced the susceptibility to the long-term impact of adverse events such as stress. There is also evidence of the benefits of social networks as people age. In a cross-national examination of the links between social network and life satisfaction in sixteen European countries, Tomini and colleagues (2016) reported that older

adults with larger personal networks had greater life satisfaction if the close network was made up of family members.

Researchers have argued that transnational family networks are an important resource for migrants, providing strategic tangible and intangible support that facilitate integration of migrants in the new country (Taylor et al., 2017; Zontini & Reynolds, 2007). Given the potential implications of migration for social networks, questions remain about who are the people who remain in the family network post-migration, and how network membership evolves across time.

Summary

Human Ecology Theory, the life course concepts of linked lives, trajectory and transitions were used along with the social convoy model in this dissertation as a framework for examining the family relationships across time. They provide an important framework for conceptualizing, understanding, and describing the experiences across participants highlighting their circumstances, relationships and the role of context in the evolution of their family connections.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

This chapter contains a review of the state of knowledge on families living transnationally to establish what is currently known, and gaps in the understandings about how people who are separated by national borders navigate family relationships across time. The review of the transnational family literature provides an understanding of the characteristics of these families, their challenges, and what sets them apart in discourse about families in general. Because the focus of this study is on family relationships across time, I have included reference to research on how families engage in, negotiate, enact, and (re)define ways of doing family. As discussed in Chapter 1, migrants from the Caribbean have been selected as an exemplar for this study, therefore this review also includes literature on Caribbean families and their migration and support patterns. This analysis of the literature sets a foundation for understanding the family life courses of older adults who have migrated.

Transnational Families

Migration is a process that involves the migrant as well as their wider kinship and social support networks. For more than 30 years, researchers have argued that in order to effectively understand migrants' lives we cannot disentangle them from relations and commitments in the home country (Glick Schiller et al., 1992). Family lives and family connections of migrants are central to this understanding. The action of leaving one's country of birth to settle in another might prompt thinking about how to navigate family relationships. The challenge is to understand the behaviours, expectations and actions towards and within families during and post-migration (Morgan, 2011a). Kilkey and colleagues (2018) underscore this point, stating that it is

important to recognize and emphasize how migrants think about their family and consider how they will to construct family ties at a distance.

Over the last fifty years there has been a significant increase in the migrant population across the world. Increasingly, international migration means there is also a growing proportion of people who are negotiating family life transnationally. Families split across national borders because of migration have been seen as a temporary state with the assumption that reunification would close the migration cycle. However, research has shown that transnational life is a permanent state for many families, arguing that despite the challenges that result from being separated by international borders, through their various family practices and kinship networks, migrants and their families find ways to live apart together (Faist, 2011; Mazzucato & Dito, 2018; Mazzucato & Schans, 2011). In fact, multiple generations of families may live transnationally and maintain contacts across borders and generations (De Haas, 2010; Glick Schiller et al., 1992). Migrant families provide powerful evidence that the boundaries of families can extend beyond a single household, geographic area or country, but instead are based on the relationships and connections that bind people over time, the flow of resources, and the rituals and rites that they collectively identify with over time (Herrera-Lima, 2001; Levitt, 2002). Mason's (1996) work on family and kinship relations supports this view of transnational families. She found that family members engaged in a range of exchanges as they navigated responsibilities to each other.

A migration transition can transform families. Studies on transnational families have provided evidence that migration shapes and reshapes migrants and their families left behind (Bryceson, 2019; Faist et al., 2013; Fog Olwig, 2007). Martin-Matthews and colleagues (2013) identified the challenges with acculturation experiences of migrants, highlighting the tensions between the cultures of the sending and receiving countries, as well as differing and sometimes

competing value systems. As a result, while family members may continue to do family in the transnational space, this is not always easy and is mediated by factors beyond the family's control.

A significant subset of migration scholarship has focused on migrants' experiences of transnational family life. There is a substantial body of work on transnational activities of women, in particular mothers and their children left behind. A number have identified challenges women face in balancing their roles as mothers with transnational family relations, child rearing and long-term absence from children (Dreby, 2010; Schmalzbauer, 2008). For some migrants, being able to leave children with family members in the home country can be useful in providing migrants a transitory period where they are able to establish themselves without their children in the new country (Pottinger, 2005; Pottinger et al., 2009). Fog Olwig (1999), in her study of children left behind, found that they had varying experiences of being members of a transnational family, with some benefiting from the increased monetary resources available.

Remy and Ndione's (2019) examination of monetary and nonmonetary gifting of Senegalese migrants, found that, while remittances were seen as important, there were tensions putting this into practice. In some instances, gifting was seen as an opportunity to show how well one is doing, in turn influencing other family members living overseas to try to do better at gifting, causing conflicts between migrants (Remy & Ndione, 2019). They find evidence that family tensions around gifts lead participants have found alternatives to gifting in order to maintain their cultural traditions. Therefore, even as migrants are constrained by cultural practices, they continue to seek alternative ways to do family.

Research on how information and communications technology (ICT) has shown how it supports co-presence in transnational families (Madianou, 2016). The advancements in ICT has

enabled additional ways to explore how family processes are navigated by migrant families. ICT enabled migrant families who previously had few means of connecting beyond letters and the occasional telephone call to experience immediate and affordable communication (Baldassar et al., 2016). Adugna (2017) explored how the use of communication media influence remittance and family relationship in Ethiopia and found that while ICT can enable ongoing family ties through support exchanges, the condition of ICT infrastructure in the home country can override the potential benefits to migrants and their family members. Cultural ideologies, such as how respect is shown, also needed to be negotiated because of the reliance on younger members of the family to navigate this new way of communicating (Adugna, 2017). Despite a growing body of research on migrants and their families use of ICT, research is still required to explore how the evolution of ICT has influenced the long-term quality of transnational family relationships.

Transnational Family Life

Conceptualizations of family have evolved over the last half century. Today there is recognition that family are diverse, and the steps people take to arrange and configure family life highlight the importance of family to them. It is important to understand the choices that people make, and how they negotiate responsibilities, relationships and commitments, and take action to create their family lives in ways that have come to be known as ‘doing family’ (Morgan, 2011b). The concept of “doing family” is based on view that families engage in a range of practices and processes that can extend beyond household and geographical spaces to acknowledge the differences among families, their ability to change and what families do with and for members (Morgan, 2011a). The ways in which people negotiate their family practices and processes, are not necessarily unchanging. Rather, manifestations of doing family are subject to change and variations as people experience different transitions over the life course (Finch, 2007). Families

are not necessarily bounded by place. Instead, family can be broadly understood to encapsulate activities that people practice notwithstanding distance. We have much to learn about how migrants, engage in continuity and make changes to family practices and processes with members who are near and at a distance.

There has been considerable research on the implications of migration for local economies in sending countries (De Haas, 2005; Feld, 2021) and how they forge pathways to establishing themselves in the new society (Alba et al., 2009; Portes et al., 2009). Studies of migrants from developing countries have explored the consequences for children left behind (Bernhard, et al., 2009; Encalada-Grez, 2019). Studies of the consequences of migration for families are often in relation to a specific interest, for example caregiving (Baldassar, 2007a; Baldassar & Merla, 2014) or remittances (financial support) (Horn, 2017a; Remy & Ndione, 2019).

Research on families and migration found that migration prompts shifts in family life and the relationships among family members (Zontini & Reynolds 2007). Migration may affect the frequency of contact between family members (Baldassar, 2008; 2016), although recent work has shown that many migrants establish transnational lives, maintaining connections in their home countries (Baldassar, 2008; Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). In doing so migrants and their families in the home country retain their “sense of collectivity and kinship in spite of being spread across multiple nations” (Baldasar et al., 2007, p. 13).

Research on transnational family support has begun to challenge some pervasive assumptions that families left behind are dependent on their immigrant relatives, and that older adults are dependent on their families (Kilkey & Merla, 2014). For example, the examination of

care relationships in transnational families shows that support practices and exchanges are not one way and that both younger and older generations engage in these. Baldassar and Merla (2014) and Kilkey and Merla (2014) contend that families living transnationally construct new ways to reflect and meet their responsibilities. For example, Cole and Groes (2016) found that migrants' family networks are the conduits for the exchange of material and affective support across borders. They also found that support is enacted by both migrants and their families in the home country in reciprocal, multidirectional ways through the exchange of money, goods, emotional support and a sense of belonging (Cole & Groes, 2016). Reciprocity in transnational families has been explored within the migration scholarship, showing that both migrants and family members in the home country provide and receive support (Bilecen et al., 2015; Faist & Bilecen, 2015).

Through support, family members near and far sustain various tangible and symbolic ties to each other (Dreby, 2010; Smith, 2002). Scholars have begun to explore the family processes, relations, and support within transnational families, however much of this work remains focussed primarily on dynamics in couple relationships or the connections between migrants and their children left behind (Glick, 2010; Mahler, 2001). Additionally, there is a growing body of work on transnational care that show how migrants continue to meet their care obligations across borders (See Baldassar & Merla, 2014; Sun, 2012).

Understanding the basis for exchanges and supportive actions is important for evaluating how relationships and supports are provided and influenced by a sense of responsibility (LeBlanc, 2017). Within the family literature there is research on reciprocity in parent-child relationship as it relates to caregiving (see LeBlanc, 2017; Leopold et al., 2014), filial obligation (see Ho & Chiang, 2016; Hsu & Shyu, 2003) and financial transfers (see Åkesson, 2011;

Leopold & Schneider, 2011). For example, Leopold and Schneider's (2011) examination of intergenerational transfers identified that perceived financial need in the adult child will trigger parental support. However, this support is mediated by whether the need was as a result of marriage, divorce or birth of a child. Findings from these studies point to the importance of and commitment to performing familial roles and meeting family obligations. Little is known, however, about the changes in relationships over time among family members and how this may affect commitments and obligations.

Other research on family processes, relations and kin support within transnational families has highlighted the role of remittances in the support of families in the home country (Åkesson, 2011; Leopold & Schneider, 2011; Zontini and Reynolds, 2007). Remittance represents a tangible mechanism through which migrants remain connected with their families, grounded in emotional connections and a sense of obligation among members. Zontini and Reynolds' (2007) research on relationships in Italian and Caribbean transnational families, found that remittances are a significant mechanism for financial stability through which families "reaffirm notions of responsibility and attachment" (p. 272). The authors found that support to family members is used to give meaning to their relationships by being there for each other, thus further developing and maintaining family relationships. Their cross-cultural study also found that for both groups the maintenance of kinship relations through frequent contact was important in the process of ongoing family support (Zontoni & Reynolds, 2007).

Transnational families also provide other forms of emotional and tangible supports to each other. For example, when mothers migrate other relatives care for their children left behind, helping families to remain connected during transnational migration (Lenette et al., 2013; Merry et al., 2017). DePalma and colleagues' (2021) exploration of migrant Nicaraguan families,

suggest that networks of aunties, mothers, sisters and other female members of the extended family system step in and care for children following migration of mothers, signaling the interdependence of the family network.

Transnational family support is a complex process that encompasses visiting, caregiving, tangible and intangible exchanges (Baldassar & Merla, 2014; Földes & Savu, 2018). Research has found that family members left behind are sources of support. Relatives support migrant family members by caring for children in their absence, while other non-migrant family members may come for short visits to provide childcare and other forms of support (Marchetti-Mercer, 2012; Marchetti-Mercer 2016).

Visits from the migrant help to re-establish and strengthen family connections. However, the ability of non-migrant family members to visit is hinged on many factors, including the ability to meet often-stringent visa requirements which are often easier for more privileged transnational families (Baldassar & Merla, 2014). Migrants and their families' ability to engage in in-person visits rest not only on their micro level actions but also on prevailing social policy in both the country of origin and the receiving country (Faist & Bilecen, 2015; Lunt, 2009).

Transnational family support takes many forms and there is evidence to suggest that there are both positive benefits (Marchetti-Mercer 2012; Marchetti-Mercer 2016) and challenges (Mason & Tipper, 2008) to both the migrant and their families in the home country resulting from support exchanges. Both migrants and their families at home, although driven by a sense of obligation, may face financial strain and emotional stress in the process of providing support. For example, support through remittances may vary depending on a migrant's ability to secure and maintain employment (Lam & Elsayed, 2021). While family members may be committed to

support each other across borders, these efforts may be hampered by lack of opportunity to reunite, or to provide support. According to Merry et al. (2017), enacting roles such as parenting may be challenged by migration status if they cannot easily travel to visit family or bring family members to the destination country for visits. Nonetheless, whether interactions and exchanges are regular or periodic, stable or fluid, they comprise important actions and indicators about how these families maintain kinship ties, responsibilities and obligations transnationally.

Caribbean Migration

The CARICOM Caribbean Community (2021) defines the Caribbean region as comprising those countries which stretch from The Bahamas in the north, to Suriname and Guyana in South America as well as Belize, in Central America. The region has a history of both internal and external migration (Bartram, 2011; Henry & Plaza, 2006; Thomas-Hope, 2002) stretching as far back as the late 1800s when workers from Jamaica and other island states went to South America to assist with the building of the Panama Canal and then settled there (Goldthree, 2016). In later years, there was the mass migration of the Windrush generation to Britain (Palmer, 1990; Wadle & Obermuller, 2019) to aid the post-war recovery. Furthermore, the colonial system which existed in the Caribbean meant that up to the mid 1970s training for professionals such as lawyers, doctors and senior social sector administrators was done in Britain for those from the English-speaking countries, as this training was seen as superior to local training or ways of doing. This system was gendered and favoured those of particular ethnic and social classes (Reddock, 2014). The gendered and classist system in place had an impact on the movement of people. However, demands for labour in the United States and Canada in the latter half of the twentieth century resulted in increase access to these countries, in particular for Caribbean women who migrated to take up job in the care sector (Crawford 2018; Fog Olwig,

2012a). Research in the 1990s showed that migration by Caribbean women outstripped that of Caribbean men (Anderson, 1993).

Early research on Caribbean migration tended to focus on the socioeconomic circumstances of the region, in particular limited employment opportunities and economic hardships as drivers of migration (Thomas-Hope, 2002). More contemporary research on Caribbean migration has begun to examine a wider range of factors beyond the traditional social and economic drivers. Currently, within Caribbean migration literature there has been considerable efforts to explore issues affecting Caribbean migrants, including mental health of migrants (Robertson-Hickling & Hickling, 2009), educational attainment (Jones et al., 2004; Samms-Vaughan, 2000), forced return (Griffin, 2009; Headley & Milovanovic, 2016; International Organization for Migration, 2010; Martin-Johnson, 2007), the impact of remittances on development (Orozco, 2017), and brain drain in the region (Mishra, 2006). Additionally, there is a large body of work on Caribbean children in migrant families, (Crawford-Brown, 1999; Crawford-Brown & Rattray, 1994; Jones et al., 2004; Pottinger, 2005; Pottinger et al., 2009).

This substantial body of work signals recognition of the importance of migration in the lives of the peoples of the region and their global networks. Of significance in this body of work is the acknowledgement that Caribbean migrants are active agents in the migration process, which has grown from the once linear conceptualization of the migrant leaving the home country, to now include an increased circulation of people, goods and services (Chamberlain, 2003). Research by Mortley (2009) on the migration experiences of St Lucian women found that female Caribbean migrants are active initiators of the migration process, leaving families behind not only for economic reasons but also to pursue education and employment opportunities.

Caribbean families have had to adjust to these shifting migration drivers and adopt various survival strategies to support both members who leave as well as those left behind (Heron, 2018; Chamberlain, 2003). The transnational experience therefore is a common feature of family life for many Caribbean nationals.

Like other transnationals, Caribbean migrants engage in transnational connections and practices, providing support to families left behind through remittances, visits and keeping in touch, while local family members assist with medical appointments, activities of daily living, and managing care for family members young and old who are left behind (Thomas-Hope, 2005). However, writers such as Nettleford (1992) and Goulbourne and Solomos (2004) have argued any conceptualization of the Caribbean diaspora must be done with the understanding that it is diverse. People migrate from the region for reasons such as multigenerational family connections living overseas, the increasingly globalised world and the agency of Caribbean nationals responding to their changing local circumstances and desires to explore options beyond their country of birth (Conway, 2002; Goulbourne & Chamberlain, 2001).

Caribbean migration to Canada has changed significantly over the last century. Migration to Canada up to the mid 1900s was less regulated and this facilitated an influx of migrants from the region. In the latter half of the twentieth century Canada, like a number of other receiving countries, developed immigration policies that facilitated migrant selection and control (Hawkins, 1988). The more stringent policies made skills, training and education the basis for entry. For example, in the late 1960s there was a shortage of English-speaking teachers and Canada looked to the Caribbean to meet the need (Hawkins, 1988). Additionally, as the Canadian economy expanded the need for workers grew and Canada entered into agreements with different Caribbean countries to recruit workers (Hawkins, 1988). This resulted in an almost

doubling of the Caribbean population in Canada between 1962 and 1971 (Anderson, 1993; Knowles, 1992). The Caribbean population in Canada is well established, particularly in Ontario and Quebec where the majority of migrants from the region have historically and continue to live.

Caribbean Families – Connections and Support Practices

Research on Caribbean families has largely focused on family structure, gender relations, and child rearing and caring patterns and practices (see Anderson & Daley, 2015; Barrow, 1996; Chevannes, 2001; Brown & Chevannes, 1998; Smith, 1988;). Caribbean families are characterized by large networks of family relations. Historically, these families have been thought of as rich in social capital providing buffers that help members negotiate life transitions (Barrow, 1996; Barrow, 2010; Heron, 2018).

Early research on Caribbean families, particularly those of Afro-Caribbean descent, have often characterized them as dysfunctional because their structure and organization patterns did not align with that of the traditional nuclear family (Chamberlain, 1999). According to Roopnarine and Hossain (2013), much of this negative characterization is born out of a misunderstanding of the historical and contemporary context which has influenced these families. They argue that it is this very feature – extended kin networks – that has allowed these families to carry out their social and reproductive functions, including care for members (Roopnarine & Hossain, 2013). Caribbean families continue to be understood within the context of their extended family lives (Brodie Walker & Morgan, 2011; Goulbourne, 2003).

Within the Caribbean family literature, research has explored Caribbean migrants' use of extended family networks in the home countries to support their migration endeavours (see Fog Olwig, 2007; Goulbourne et al., 2010). Kinship networks enact adaptive family economic and

supportive strategies that provide both tangible and intangible supports to family members. For example, there is evidence that Afro-Caribbean family networks facilitate child shifting (sending children to live permanently with other kin or non-kin), child minding (providing oversight of children), or fostering (sending children to live temporarily with kin or non-kin) of children, allowing parents, typically mothers, to migrate and advance themselves and their families financially (Barrow, 2010; Pottinger, 2005; Pottinger et al., 2009). Therefore, migrant Caribbean women tend to be central in the cultivation and maintenance of transnational kinship ties and support (Chamberlain, 2004; Ho, 1999) as they remain connected to families at home who care for their children.

In Caribbean families, support is rooted in cultural expectations, and intergenerational reciprocal care is seen as a return on investment for the help that was provided in the past or support at a time of great difficulty thus ensuring security in old age (Clark, 1999). This is a key feature of Caribbean family life, binding members in an unspoken moral contract of sorts. How families negotiate care responsibilities signals quality of relationships and strength of the sense of obligation to each other. Within these families there is a range of complex relations of kin and non-kin aunts, uncles, grandparents and siblings (Barrow, 2010; Chamberlain, 1999) who are assumed to form the pillar of family care and support throughout the life course. Family relations are seen as a social and economic responsibility as parents and other adults care for children, and children are expected to support these persons in later life (Fog Olwig, 1999).

Despite the extensive Caribbean family and migration scholarship over the last half century, little of this research explores older adults within these families. Their experiences tend to be subsumed in the wider Caribbean family and migration discourse, often filtered through the lens of a unidirectional exchanges between family members or the caring and rearing of young

children (see Jones et al., 2004; Pottinger, 2005; Pottinger et al., 2009). Nonetheless, Chamberlain (1995) in exploring the stories of Caribbean immigrants to Britain contends that:

“[t]he strength of family organization in supporting migration suggests, clearly, a willingness to sanction it, and a positive disposition towards it. What may appear to be a personal economic motive to migrate, often involves a *family history*” (Chamberlain, 1995, p. 267).

Other authors have echoed Chamberlain’s (1995) position, concurring that migration can sometimes be a family strategy enabling families to mobilize resources and improve options for members (see Chiswick & Miller, 2005; Clarke & King, 2005; Lam & Yeoh, 2019; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002). Researchers note that while migration presents a range of options and opportunities for families, it can also be a source of tension as families reconstruct and redefine roles in the wake of members leaving (Faist et al., 2013; Mason & Tipper, 2008). We are yet to understand the consequences for families and the varying impacts on family networks across the life courses of migrant families.

Caribbean families tend not to migrate all at once. More often migration occurs when one member leaves with the expectation that other family members will follow (Goulbourne, 2003; Thomas-Hope, 2005, 2012). Research on children in Caribbean migrant families has shown this history of chain migration. Crawford-Brown (1999), for example, discusses the challenges of parental migration in her study of migrants and their children left behind. She found that parents, in particularly mothers, struggled with the guilt of having to leave children behind. Furthermore, when families are reunited, both parents and children had to reconstruct their relationship, a finding echoed by other researchers (See Crawford-Brown & Rattray, 1994; Fog Olwig, 2007, 2012; Jones et al., 2004; Pottinger, 2005; Pottinger et al., 2009). While chain migration has

created some challenges for Caribbean migrant families, it has also helped to ensure that family and social links remain strong, as these are maintained through regular contact, visits, supporting families left behind and return migration (Goulbourne, 2003; Fog Olwig, 2012; Zontini & Reynolds, 2007).

The small body of research evidence of family support practices in the Caribbean shows that they are varied. Kinship networks help families by providing a source of support. However, while the view of Caribbean families as warm, safe spaces of security for members persists and is still widely held across the region, there are longstanding issues of parental abuse, family strife and violence. In his classic study of kinship and class in the West Indies, Smith (1988) contends that “[t]o study the West Indian family one has to understand the relation between what people say is correct behaviour and what they actually do” (p. 2). In fact, while family support has been identified as a mechanism for survival within Caribbean families, research on this aspect of Caribbean life remains largely underdeveloped. The research on child rearing and shifting patterns for example, has provided insights into elements of this aspect of family support (Jones et al., 2004; Pottinger, 2005; Pottinger et al., 2009), however other forms of family support remain understudied in the Caribbean context. Further, there is little empirical evidence to support how other forms of family are enacted and are sustained across the family life course. Therefore, my research is an initial step to begin the exploration of support exchanges of older migrants of Caribbean heritage by exploring how they navigate family relationships over time.

Summary

In summary, while there is a growing body of research on migrants and their families, few studies have utilized a life course frame to explore specifically migrants’ experiences and their perspectives on how their family relationships evolve. The studies discussed above

highlight some key features of transnational families and the ways in which members support each other. Nevertheless, gaps in the knowledge about how migrants' family life courses evolve as they as they age remain. Exploring issues such as these will provide a more complex and in depth understanding of the experiences of people navigating family life transnationally, and how ideas of family are redefined across the life course.

This study is a step toward a greater understanding of family life over time. By presenting accounts of family relationships and family support over time, I hope to inform insights that could be useful as we expand and refine conceptualizations of family life courses including how individuals define their family, how family membership changes and how these inform our understanding of linked lives in families.

Chapter 4: Methodology

In this chapter I present the philosophical underpinnings, research design, sample and setting, sampling procedures, recruitment, data collection procedures and data analysis of the study.

In this study I aim to answer research questions related to participants' experiences of family connections for older adults who have experienced migration. Although there is a well-established body of literature about families in general, and growing knowledge about the influence of migration on families, there is a knowledge gap about family relationships across the life course post migration. The objective of this study is to address this gap in knowledge, in order to extend understandings of families.

Given the limited state of knowledge of family relationships over time, I selected a qualitative approach. This research approach allowed participants the opportunity to share their ideas and respond to questions in their own words in ways that are meaningful to them and that provide insights into their experiences (Guest et al., 2013; Willig, 2013).

Merriam (2009) asserts that a hallmark of qualitative research is to focus on meaning and understanding, not just on how people make sense of the world but also on “delineating the process of meaning-making and describing how people interpret what they experience” (p. 14). Thus, descriptions of phenomena such as the evolution of families across the life course are assumed to be based in individuals' personal experiences and to emphasize the emic or the lived perspective (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research offers the flexibility needed to retell the stories of participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Meaningfulness arises through listening, interpreting,

triangulating, and retelling of participants' accounts (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), offering researchers access to in-depth understanding of how participants experience the phenomena and the meanings that they attribute to these experiences.

Philosophical Underpinnings

There are many qualitative designs, but I explicitly chose one that reflects a constructivist epistemology for two reasons. First, other scholars have noted that stories that individuals tell about their experiences are socially constructed and co-constructed through the relational process with the researcher (Baddeley et al., 2015). Second, I migrated from the Caribbean and wanted to clearly acknowledge that my own experiences shaped the way I framed questions during data collection, and interpreted data. I discuss this point in more detail later in this chapter.

The stories that people tell about their experiences and the meanings ascribed to them are therefore linked and are shaped by the thoughts, ensuing events and feelings over time. A constructivist perspective acknowledges that memory is imperfect and may not reflect the accuracy of the experience (Baddeley et al, 2015). What are most important are memories of one's own life or autobiographical memory (Eysenck & Keane, 2015) that allow participants to answer questions about past experiences that are assumed to include their interpretations and recall about the phenomenon of interest (Baddeley et al, 2015). Memories exist in context and, as we engage with participants, their memories are being constructed and co-constructed through the research process. Memories are affected by factors such as the questions asked, relationship with the researcher and timing in the life of participants (Halcomb & Peters, 2016). Additionally, the researcher only knows the parts of a participant's story that they choose to share. My interest is in how and what participants shared about their experience of family and migration.

Consequently, the researcher has an active role in the creation of knowledge, as they apply interpretations to the data. It is therefore “impossible to separate the inquirer from the inquired” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p.88). A qualitative researcher, therefore, should identify and accept their experiences and beliefs, understanding how they can contribute, impact and shape the data (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006) in order to ensure that they are giving credence to the various realities and other ways of knowing and being. In this study, knowledge was co-created, and is a product of the interaction among my reality and that of my participants (Daly, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). I accept that there is a social reality of families and how each participant experiences this will be different and therefore endeavoured to explore the participants’ subjective perception of their family relationships across time.

Research Design

Qualitative Descriptive Design

The primary aim of a descriptive qualitative study is to describe a phenomenon from the perspective to those who experience it (Sandelowski, 2000). It was chosen for this study because it helps to describe perceptions and experiences of the target populations, providing an account of their experience of the phenomena (Sandelowski, 2000). The approach is useful in examining topics where there has been little previous investigation or where it is poorly understood with specific groups (Lambert & Lambert, 2012; Kim et al., 2017). In the case of this research, there is a significant body of knowledge about families, and some research on the influence of migration on families. However, there is a gap in knowledge about how migration might influence families from the Caribbean and how their family life courses evolve.

Data collection in descriptive qualitative studies includes interviews with participants, in order to learn more about how they describe the phenomenon of interest (Sandelowski, 2000;

2010). Technological advances in online platforms have provided the capacity to engage participants across large distances (Walker, 2013). The use of online platform was important for this research for two reasons: participants were spread out across a broad geographic area of the city of Edmonton and surrounding communities; and the ongoing pandemic meant that face-to-face interviewing was not possible. As a result, data collection occurred over the Zoom platform.

Context of the Study

The primary setting of this study was Edmonton, a city in the province of Alberta, in western Canada. The province has a large energy-based economy and has historically enjoyed high rates of both provincial and international migrant moving there for work. The booming economy has attracted migrants from all over the globe to Alberta. Between 1980 and 2001 the Province saw its largest growth in the number of migrants moving there from outside of Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017).

Most migrants to Alberta have been from countries in Europe (Government of Alberta, 2009). Caribbean migrants to Canada have predominantly settled in Ontario and Quebec (Statistics Canada, 2007). Notwithstanding the various programs by both federal and provincial governments to attract migrants to other provinces, the majority of Caribbean migrants continue to settle in the two provinces in central Canada as they both offer established social, cultural and economic networks, which new migrants can tap (Statistic Canada, 2021). The population of migrants from the Caribbean continues to be concentrated largely in Ontario and Quebec which account for approximately 91% these migrants (Statistics Canada, 2007). The 1970s was the peak period for Caribbean migration to Canada (Walker, 1984). In the 1970s when many of the participants came to Canada, 2.1% of all immigrants were from the Caribbean (Statistics Canada, 2016). Numbers who settled in Alberta were too small to report.

Participants

Braun and Clarke (2013) advise that researchers need to be mindful of their inclusion and exclusion criteria when selecting participants. This ensures that those with stories to be shared is aligned so that the research questions can be answered. To participate in this study older adults had to have lived in Canada for a minimum of 20 years. Therefore, those older adults who did not live in Canada permanently, as well as “late in life family joiners” (Horn, 2019), were excluded from the study. These criteria ensured that participants had a significant experience living in Canada, away from family, and could share their experiences of family life over time. Participants were men or women who met the following criteria:

- i. they were originally from one of the English-speaking islands of the Caribbean;
- ii. they were over 60 years of age; and
- iii. they had migrated and lived permanently in Canada for over 20 years.
- iv. they had interest in the study and the ability to navigate the virtual meeting platform and engage in conversation in an expressive and articulate manner.

Qualitative research is focused on developing in-depth and detailed accounts of participants experiences and therefore, having a firmly established number of participants for the study was not required. Sandelowski (1995) states that, in qualitative research, the final sample size is a matter of judgement and evaluating the quality of the data yielded. Therefore, the sample should be large enough to uncover important insights while not being too repetitive (Mason, 2010; Guest et al., 2006; Given, 2016). In this research the sample consisted of 10 participants who varied in terms of family connections (strong, rebuilding, poor), marital status (married, never married and divorced), parental status (with children, without children), and the timing of marital status and parental status (pre or post migration).

Data Collection

Recruitment Strategy

Participants were recruited via a combination of snowball and purposive methods. Purposive sampling strategy was used to ensure that the participants selected for the study had the experience and knowledge about the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Snowball recruitment strategy helped to identify persons who matched the study criteria through current participants. I also connected with individuals through a local community organization whose membership is comprised of individuals from the Caribbean. Connecting with participants via their local community organization helped to facilitate the building of rapport with gatekeepers who were valuable linkages to participants and helped with initial contact.

The data were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic and, as a result, all initial contact with participants was done over the telephone and by email. The researcher had to remain flexible as there were participants who initially agreed to be interviewed, but who could not participate because they were impacted by the ongoing pandemic or for other personal reasons. Each of these potential participants was encouraged to contact me if, and when, they felt they were able to take part in the study. Through the initial contact I was able to begin the process of building rapport with participants and this helped to reduce any concerns that they had about the value of their stories. Interviews were then scheduled around participants' schedules and my availability.

Ethics

Permission to conduct this study was granted through the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board (study identification number Pro00103481). The interview guide and demographic

questionnaire, information letter, and informed consent form were all submitted to the Research Ethics Board as part of the ethics review process for the study.

Informed Consent

Potential participants provided their contact information (telephone and email addresses) if they were interested in being included in the study. In the initial telephone meeting, participants were screened to ensure that they met the inclusion criteria and were provided with a verbal description of the study. The letter to participants (Appendix A) and informed consent form (Appendix B) were sent via email to each participant for review. They were asked to indicate if they were interested in participating and if they had any questions about the research.

The purpose of the study was reviewed prior to each interview and the informed consent form was also reviewed line by line with each participant. This review included the aims and methods of the study, and possible risks and benefits of participation. Time was taken to ensure that participants understood the research methodology – including data collection, management and write up of findings – to support them feeling free to tell their stories in their own way. All participants in the study were able to provide voluntary consent. In keeping with Marshall and Rossman's (2011) guidance of ensuring that participants have detailed knowledge of the study and the safeguarding of ethical standards, participants were also encouraged to ask questions before and after their interviews. Verbal consents were collected from each participant at the beginning of their first interview as interviews were being conducted virtually. Verbal consents were an acceptable means of consent (Lawton et al., 2017) as it prevented the undue burden on participants having to print, sign, scan and email the consent forms.

There were no identifiable risks associated with participating in this study. However, there was the possibility that talking about family life and relationships could cause distress for the participants. I remained sensitive to this and ensured that I always had support resources on

hand to share with participants should it be required. At no point in the interviewing process did I detect any distress from the participants as they shared their stories.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit the participants' perspectives on the evolution of their families across their life course. Conversation is a natural part of life and way of connecting with others. It is a form of engagement that is considered safe by most cultures (Mattingly & Lawlor, 2000).

Qualitative interviews provide a way to elicit participants' ideas about their experiences (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Through what participants choose to share, the way they choose to share and the meanings they attach to their stories, researchers can gain insights into their experiences (Willig, 2008). While an interview guide was created for the research, the qualitative research design required that the researcher remain flexible, allowing both researcher and participants to adjust, omit or reformulate questions. This flexibility allowed for the natural detailed descriptions of the lived experiences of these participants' family connections and supported the answering of the research questions of this study.

When the study protocol was developed, the intention was to do two interviews with each participant. This is in keeping with Olson's (2011) recommendation that participants are interviewed multiple times, where possible. Follow-up interviews give the researcher the opportunity to explore aspects of the narratives that are unclear and formulate additional questions as needed. In the second interviews, I clarified my understanding of participants' experiences, ensuring alignment between their meanings and my understandings. Additionally, follow-up interviews allowed for probing, especially if one participant mentioned a new idea or concept that had not been presented before by others. Five participants agreed to a second interview.

Participants were asked to talk about their experiences of family relationships, which for some was challenging because of the feelings and emotions associated with these experiences. The development of a relationship between each participant and the researcher over the recruitment and interviewing process was pivotal in helping to develop trust. Consequently, during the interviews I was able to respond to and clarify firsthand information as they were being shared enabling me to yield greater detail and depth to the stories.

All interviews were conducted over the Zoom platform, since COVID-19 restrictions as and University of Alberta research regulations about data collection during the pandemic restricted face-to-face interviewing. Participants had to be able to navigate online platforms to engage with the researcher; this meant that they required a level of computer mastery or access to someone to assist them. Therefore, participants who were less technologically competent or who did not have support could not participate. While conducting virtual interviews provided expediency given the ongoing pandemic (Roberts et al., 2021), I think that during the recruitment of participants, I had to invest more time creating connections with participants than would have been required in the face-to-face format. An important benefit of the virtual format is that it allowed me to capture video and audio recordings of the interviews. I found that this provided me with an opportunity to listen more keenly to participants and make notes as other questions emerged. However, I did feel that, because the interviews were conducted online, participants did not have opportunities to share artifacts such as photos and mementoes, that reflected their experience of family and relationships for them.

I was mindful of the need to remain flexible in the interview process and allow room for asking questions to distill and clarify what I was hearing. This was done if I was not understanding the story that the participant was sharing, and to enable me to co-construct a

deeper understanding of their story. Therefore, while I had the interviewed guide on hand, a non-directive style of interviewing was used, and participants were encouraged to share openly their experiences and feelings associated with these in the ways that they were most comfortable. Some opted to use dialect to give contour to aspects of their stories.

I began each interview by asking the participants to share their migration story, asking “Could you share how you came to be living in Canada?”. Other questions asked included: What are the ways that you have remained connected to families back home? What are the ways that you have supported or received support from your family members? What were the meanings that you associate with maintaining those connections and support exchanges? Interviews lasted between sixty to ninety minutes and the conversation continued for as long as participants were able and willing to share. At the end of the first interview, I completed a short demographic sheet (Appendix D) to gather information on age, length of time and status in Canada, as well as marital, employment and education status.

I encouraged participants to share their story in ways that they felt comfortable. Some needed me to do prompting at different points to move the interview along, while others needed few interventions. Together this flexible approach on my part resulted in conversations with participants that provided insightful and rich data.

Data Analysis

The data analysis focused on the accounts of the participants and was supported by my field notes and reflections. The data for the research are participants' accounts of their experiences, and so I was mindful of Frank's (2000) warning to take time in analyzing the data to mitigate potential misunderstandings of the relevance of the story.

I conducted a total of 15 interviews with my 10 participants, each lasting between sixty and ninety minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, and the conversations were reread and replayed several times to ensure that no data were missing from the transcripts. As the transcription was being undertaken, I remained sensitive to what I was seeing during the process of being immersed in the data. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), this “sensitivity allows the researcher to grasp meaning and respond intellectually and emotionally to what is being said in the data and later to arrive at concepts that are grounded in the data” (p. 41). This kept me grounded in the data and attuned to what I was learning from each transcript. Transcribing is a laborious but valuable process. Not only did it help me to develop significant insights into the data but also served as kind of triangulation of my own emotions and understandings about my self-reflective notes.

The process of watching and listening to the interviews many times, transcribing them, reading and rereading the transcripts created indelible memories of the participants’ stories, sometimes overwhelming me with the sheer volume and complexity of the data. I questioned my skills as an interviewer, wondering if I asked questions in the correct order or at the right time, or followed up effectively on threads shared. I had to be mindful to clarify comments such as “you know” by participants to ensure that they were not using insider language to share information that could be subject to my interpretation of meaning versus when participants used the phrase to signal an end to their comment. Bird (2005) has indicated that the transcription phase is a key stage of the analysis.

As an initial step to begin the process of understanding the data, I spent hours reading and rereading the transcript and my notes. This was done to ensure that I remained sensitive to data and could grasp what the participants were sharing. This is the process that I undertook with all

the transcripts to develop questions for subsequent interviews as well as remain engaged with and sensitive to the data. Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggest that this sensitivity allows the researcher to grasp meanings and make connections within and across transcripts, identifying patterns and themes in the data.

I analyzed the transcripts in rounds. For the first round I looked at each transcript individually, focussing on each individual participant's story, the experiences that were embedded, and the uniqueness of each story. The intent here was not to make links about what was happening across transcripts but instead to develop an appreciation and understanding of each individual story. This enabled me to identify the consequential patterns or categories in each transcript in the first instance before moving to identifying the themes across the data. I tried to do this review in a sequential manner, reading each transcript from beginning to end, however, I sometimes found myself looping back to earlier parts of each transcript to clarify and make links between different parts of the data. With each review of the transcripts, additional insights, observations and broad themes emerged. I readily saw my own footprint in the data and how my questions shaped the content that was shared, reflecting Saldaña's (2016) reminder about the inextricable link between researcher and the research. Through this process I was able to identify parts of the data that were at the semantic as opposed to the latent level (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These segments of the data were used to identify themes and progress from descriptions to interpretation, allowing me to identify meanings and implications from the data.

Thematic Analysis.

I used a qualitative thematic analysis to identify, analyse and report on the patterns of participants experiences of family connections and support across the life course. Thematic analysis allows for the identification of patterns or themes within the data, analysing these patterns and reporting them (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is applicable to this study

as it enabled cross-case analysis to identify common themes that arose across participants (Creswell, 2007; Nowell et al., 2017). This method enabled the identification of themes that depict patterns of relationship and support experiences for participants, allowing the researcher to interpret the why of these themes.

Braun and Clarke (2006) have argued that there are choices that the researcher must reflect on when using thematic analysis. These include, identify what is a theme within the data. Vaismoradi and colleagues (2016) assert that there is a difference between themes and categories. They go on to explain that categories are the “simple description of participants accounts”, while themes are the “more implicit and abstract level, and which requires interpretation” (Vaismoradi et al, 2016). In making this decision Braun and Clarke (2006) encourages researchers to remain flexible, as reconsiderations may have to be made as one becomes more familiar with the data. They also caution researchers to be mindful of their approach to identifying themes within the data, ensuring that themes are linked to the data (Patton, 2002). Finally, researchers need to decide on the level on which the themes are to be identified. They distinguish between two levels of themes – semantic and latent. Semantic level themes provide “surface meanings of the data and the analyst is not looking for anything beyond what a participant has said” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 13). Conversely, latent level themes “identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations and ideologies that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data” (p.13). Thematic analysis therefore can be used to summarise and interpret data (Clarke & Braun, 2016).

Thematic analysis is appropriate in research that examines ideas and issues that are understudied and where the experiences of people are not known. In doing so it begins to provide a window into the social reality of these who experience the phenomenon. Braun and Clark

(2006) have provided a six-step framework for thematic analysis to identify themes within and across cases. The steps are:

- i. Familiarizing yourself with the data - Reading the transcript multiple times and acquiring a familiarity with the surface or semantic meanings.
- ii. Generating initial codes – Identifying codes that reflect key ideas in the data which may relate to the research question(s).
- iii. Searching for patterns and themes – Grouping codes that relate to a particular idea, leading to theme identification.
- iv. Reviewing themes – Examining themes in relation to the codes generated and the data as a whole.
- v. Defining and naming themes – Defining and naming themes, explaining what is happening within the data and how this is connected to the research questions.
- vi. Writing the analysis – Presenting vivid and compelling examples related to the research question and literature.

Saldana (2016) states that coding of data should be viewed as “a cyclical act” (pg. 9), in which one must engage many times to effectively identify the salient points within the data. Following this recommendation, my initial process for coding emerged gradually as I became more engrossed in and learned from the data. I went through each transcript and colour coded sections and wrote notes to identify areas that related to 1) migration stories and migrants’ family connections and support (green); 2) areas that were unclear (red); and 3) what I was thinking and feeling as I reviewed (blue). I wrote a summary for each transcript, which also included any additional observations and questions that I had about what I was seeing and the connections that these had to my research questions. These broad themes are presented in the findings chapter

along with illustrative quotes that capture the essence of themes. These examples were used to bolster discussions and reflect the experiences of family connections and support for older migrants. A significant amount of time was dedicated to the data analysis process as I was mindful that this process needed to be ongoing, even as I collected the data. Merriam (2009) cautions that “without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming” (p. 171). Therefore, it was important to continue analysis during and between interviews. In the subsequent stages of coding the data, words and phrases repeated several times by participants were used as codes as they pointed to patterns in the data.

Rigor

Rigor is a central issue for qualitative researchers. My decision to use a qualitative methodology to explore the lives of older Caribbean migrants reflects my concern for and recognition of the value of the stories. Therefore, particular care was taken to ensure that I attended to the quality, authenticity and truthfulness of findings in order to ensure that readers could trust the results (Guest et al., 2013). To do this, I shared with each participant their transcript to ensure that I captured what they were saying. I conducted follow-up interviews where possible, to further explore points and ensure that I understood what participants shared. My supervisory team reviewed the transcripts and engaged with me in thoughtful discussions about how I was working with participants, as well as what I was seeing in the data and ensuring that necessary adjustments are undertaken to improve the quality of data. I also engaged in peer debriefs with colleagues to ensure that I avoided narrow interpretations.

Another strategy used was to return to participants with summaries of what I was learning from their narratives to ensure that my interpretation and the participant’s understanding of what was shared aligned. Further, my researcher’s narrative and notes helped to ensure that I captured

my thinking, struggles and feelings, and made them visible as part of both the data collection and analysis process to highlight any biases or introduction of my experiences. Older migrants shared data-rich stories about their experiences of family life within a transnational context. I ensured that these descriptions were included as evidence to not only support the answering of my research questions but to also show how my understandings aligned with what was shared.

Researcher's Narrative

I am a migrant. In fact, I am part of the third generation of my family living transnationally. My paternal grandfather was a violinist on ships, and several of my father's siblings were part of the Windrush generation that moved to England in the late 1950s.

This research is rooted in my professional and personal journey. As a social worker, working in the Caribbean with families of young children, I saw both the benefits and challenges of international migration for family life. While working with colleagues across the Caribbean I helped organize parenting initiatives and gained an appreciation for family challenges and contexts, particularly those that arose because a family member had migrated. Recognizing that, while many families were financially more stable because of migration, there were also many non-financial difficulties that these families also navigated because of migration. Among the attendant challenges associated with migration, I saw difficulties such as child abuse, "parentified children" – children carrying out caregiving responsibilities for siblings as a result of parental migration (Crawford-Brown & Rattray, 1994), and grandparents caring for small children. As I worked with families and often saw how relationships did not always unfold in tandem with cultural narratives. For example, I saw parents who struggled to (re)connect with their children after long periods of separation, notwithstanding the ongoing support that they provided during their absence. I also saw how issues related to older adults within families were

often positioned through the lens of their involvement with younger family members. I often wondered how family ties and supportive relationships in families evolved.

In 2013, I moved with my spouse and child to Canada and thus began my journey of experiencing transnational living as a migrant. I was no stranger to transnational family life as my mother and sisters had migrated 20 plus years before, so I knew what it was like to organise and participate in family life across distance. Before migrating, I provided care for nieces and nephews left behind and hosted them for holidays in the years post-reunification with their parents. Moreover, I visited my family members in other countries to celebrate and mourn various life events.

For me, the beginning of my advanced graduate studies dovetailed with our migratory journey, causing me to experience two transitional life events at the same time. I was navigating the student landscape, a new environment, and newcomer experiences simultaneously. Despite my years of being a member in a transnational family, I was not prepared for the multiple challenges produced by migration, graduate student life and being a newcomer in Canada. While we lived in Jamaica, we were a source of support for our families overseas. As we negotiated our new life, we were on the receiving end of this reciprocal family support, which mitigated many of the challenges faced.

As a migrant and a researcher, I am cognizant of my own unfolding story and how it was co-created and recreated as I interacted with participants. This self-reflection and documenting who I am in this research and what I bring to the research, reveals my motivations but also is shared to make me accountable. My ongoing self-reflection acted as a point of awareness, tension and learning as I explored the stories of participants. It motivated ongoing conversations with participants, supervisors and colleagues, keeping me aware of if, when and how I my

biases, experiences and understandings were seeping into how I arrived at the conclusions I was drawing from the participants' narratives. Self-reflection also helped me to stay mindful of the space that I occupy with and in relation to other migrants, remaining cognizant that, while threads of their story and my story may be similar, their stories were theirs. In doing so I remained respectful of the value of my participants' knowledge, while working closely with them as partners in the research process (Richard & Morse, 2013).

To support this process, I kept notes to capture my reflections. Olson (2011) suggests that notes be recorded following each interview. This, she argues, helps to enhance the quality of the data as well also to nuance the data by providing "context of the interview and about any other aspect of the interview that may be important to its accurate interpretation" (Olson, 2011 p. 61). Field notes also provided a space for me to engage in active reflection that helped in the development of insights, ideas or themes in the research (Creswell, 2013). In these notes I captured how I felt about the interviews, what surprised me from the interviews, and thoughts I was having about how the data was confirming and dispelling ideas that I had about the phenomenon I was exploring.

Reflexivity in qualitative research is an important activity as it not only reveals the motivations for undertaking the research but also helps to construct a picture of the researcher's assumptions that have shaped the study. My participants, were storying parts of my own experience as a migrant. My thesis topic was influenced by my life experiences as a transnational family member and, as I developed an interest in the evolution of family relationships across time while navigating these connections across borders, I too was navigating ways to maintain similar connections. For example, I have not physically been in the same place with my mother and all my siblings for nearly twenty-five years because we live across a total of four countries,

and various circumstances have hindered these efforts. I did not disclose my family context to my participants; however, my Jamaican accent is still very thick, and signalled to participants that I was not raised in Canada and so had migrated during adulthood. This, coupled with my knowledge of many of the English-speaking islands in the Caribbean, having worked in and visited many of them, enabled me to talk about each participant's homeland and identify when they were using context specific language techniques. I believe that this provided a level of comfort for participants and helped put them at ease to share their stories without being interrupted to clarify language used. Further, my training as a social worker equipped me with active listening and assessment skills that enriched the interviewing process and enabled participants to feel like they were being listened to as they shared their stories.

Summary

This research provided opportunities for older adults to share their experiences of family relationships over time. In this chapter the research paradigm and the chosen methods to explore the research questions were shared. Using semi structured interviewing and thematic analysis, I explored the participants accounts of their family experiences and relationship dynamics over time are presented in the next chapter. A final section on my own narrative places my experience as a migrant from the Caribbean within the project.

Chapter 5: Results

In this chapter I present the findings from participants' interviews that illustrated family connections and support across the life course. This chapter is divided into two sections: 1) participant information and demographic summary; and 2) findings.

Participant Information and Demographic Summary

Table 1 provides a summary of demographic and family information of the ten participants. Demographic information indicates sex, age, country of origin, years living in Canada in Canada, citizenship, education and employment status.

Participants had been living in Canada for an average of 41 years. All were Canadian citizens, with several indicating that they maintain citizenship in their country of birth as well. All but one had some post-secondary education and three had graduate degrees. All had been in the labour force though several were now working part time or were retired

Participants were at different stages of the family life course when they migrated. Six had transitioned to parenthood prior to moving to Canada. All reported that at the time of migration they had at least one parent alive, and all participants had siblings. Current family status shows that nearly all were married or living with a partner; one was divorced, one widowed, one had never been married and four were remarried/partnered. Most had children and six indicated that they had grandchildren.

Table 1: Research Participants

Participants	Sex	Age	Reason for Moving to Canada	Years Living in Canada	Employment Status	Highest Level of Education Attained	Marital Status	Number of Children
Desiree	F	72	Study; Family Choice	24 years	Retired	Post-graduate degree	Married	2
Novelette	F	69	Family reunification	53 years	Retired	University degree	Single	None
John	M	69	Family Choice	23 years	Retired	Diploma from college/trade school	Married	4
Frank	M	70	Study	50 years	Working part-time	Diploma from college/trade school	Living with partner	8
Terrence	M	62	Family reunification	46 years	Working full-time	University degree	Divorced	3
James	M	74	Family Choice	45 years	Working part-time	Diploma from college/trade school	Married	4
Alice	F	68	Family reunification	45 years	Working full-time	Post-graduate degree	Living with partner	4
Tilly	F	68	Marriage	41 years	Retired	Diploma from college/trade school	Married	6
Jennifer	F	73	Study	47 years	Retired	Post-graduate degree	Married	1
Angela	F	71	Marriage	40 years	Retired	High School	Widowed	2

Participants' Profiles

Desiree has lived in Canada for 24 years. She lives with her husband and adult daughter. She has one sister, a brother and lots of nieces and nephews in her home country. She moved to Canada to attend university in Toronto. When she began having children she wanted to provide greater opportunities for them beyond what she felt were available in her home country. She, her husband and children moved to Edmonton, Alberta although they did not have any family connections or social network there. Her husband had previous experience working in the oil field and they felt that this was where he could easily get a job.

Novelette moved to Canada when she was 16 years old. Her journey began through a family reunification process. She migrated to live with her mother and brother who had moved to Toronto several years before. She does not have children and has never married but has an extensive family network in her home country which she said that she discovered only after moving away. She moved to Edmonton on the encouragement of her brother shortly after university. Soon after she moved, circumstances changed for her brother and his family and he moved back to Toronto. She was in a “*good and stable job*” so she stayed and has lived in Edmonton ever since. She makes frequent visits to her home country to connect with family members and she enjoys having them come to visit. She lamented the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on travel and her ability to see family.

John is married and has four children. His two older children live in the United States and are from a previous relationship. He and his wife moved to Canada with the two younger children and they have always lived in Edmonton since then. He does not have any family connections in Canada outside of his wife and children. Now late in his family life course he reports that, as he has aged, he “feels a strong desire to be connected to them (Siblings) and

know what is happening in their lives”. Over the years he has been particularly close to his youngest brother, who has visited him several times in Canada.

Frank moved to Canada for post-secondary education and remained after he completed his studies. He has been married twice and has 8 children two of whom are adopted. He moved to Alberta for work and only one of his children is in the Province. He does not see his other children very often and is okay with that as he knows that they are alright. Most of his siblings have moved to other countries so he see them infrequently, but he has other extended family members in his home country and visits there regularly.

Terrence moved to Canada in his teenage years with the family who adopted him when he was a small child. He has only ever lived in Alberta but continues to feel a strong connection to his home country and family members there. Although adopted, he has, over the years, remained close to his birth mother and half siblings. Over the years he has made it a priority to visit his home country and assist family members when he can.

James moved to Canada with his then-wife and three children. Difficult family relationships pre-migration resulted in the severing of connections with his father, siblings and other close family members following his move to Canada. He subsequently divorced. His second wife encouraged him to get in touch with his siblings in his home country. He has reconnected with his siblings and gotten to know them and their children. He is close with his children and with his current wife’s siblings.

Alice migrated to Canada with her toddler to live with her mother in Toronto. She and her child moved to Alberta for work after she completed her first degree. She later had three more children with her two now ex-husbands. As a single mother she was acutely aware of the importance of having a network to support her as she raised her children. She speaks of the

importance of the relationships with her like-family network over the years and how this network has supported her, enabling her to achieve goals. She now lives with her partner and is very close to her children. Over the years she has maintained cordial relationships with her ex-husbands because, as she says, “without them she would not have had her children”.

Tilly moved to Canada following a marriage to her Canadian partner, leaving her son with his paternal grandparents. She talks of the difficulties of the marriage and feeling like she was trapped. Her relationships with family and non-family connections in Canada and her home country, provided an outlet for her to move on from the marriage and rebuild herself. She remarried and is very close to her children and step children, providing support to help them with raising their children. She has also maintained her connections with her siblings in her home country and tries to visit them each year.

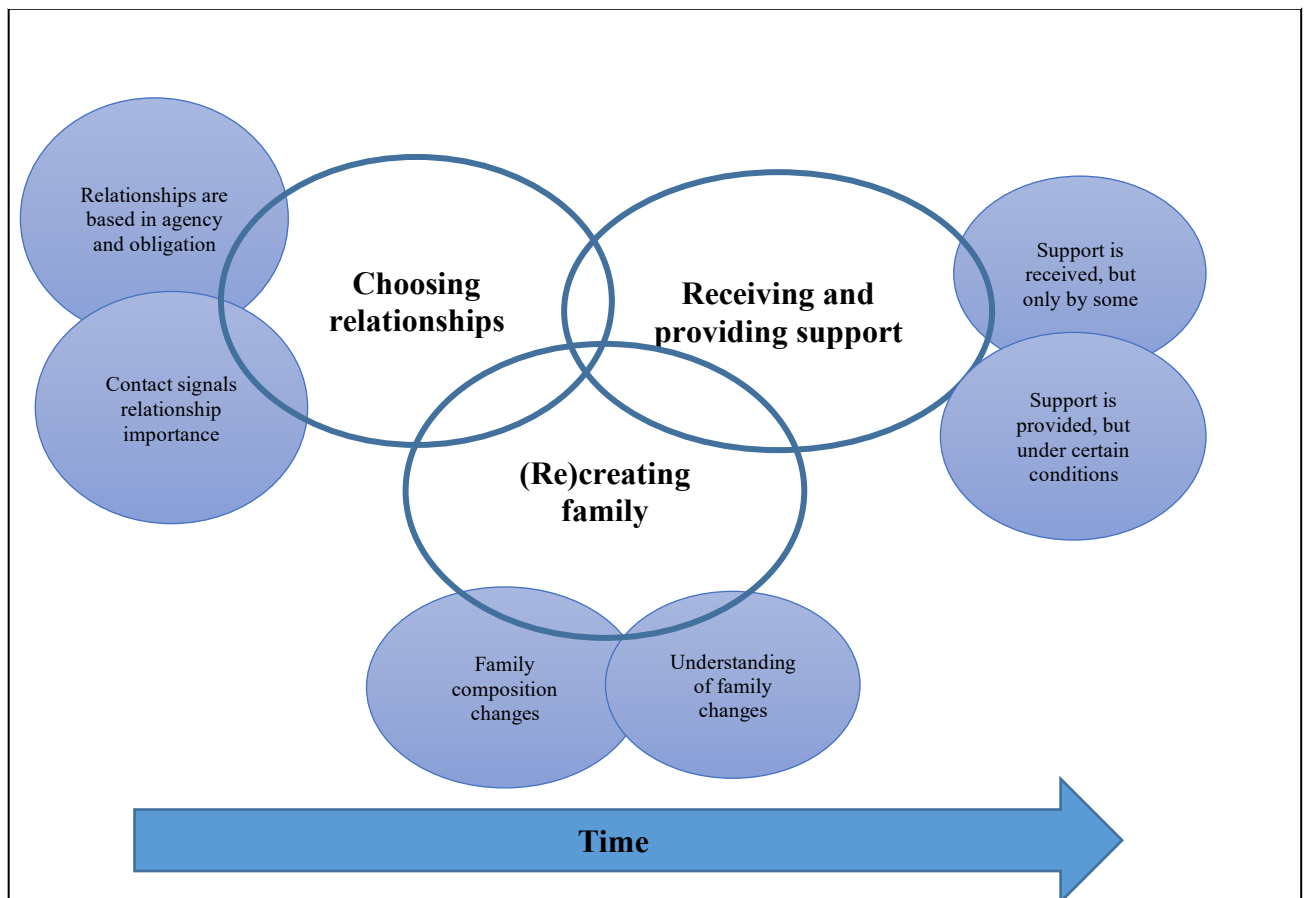
Jennifer came to Canada on a work study program and she has always lived in Alberta. She has one child, a daughter, who she left with her mother. She eventually brought her daughter to Canada and shared that her mother was a key source of support when her daughter came to Canada. Jennifer is married and remains close to her daughter, seeing her several times per week.

Angela moved to rural Alberta, Canada with her young son following her marriage to a Canadian. She had poor family relationships prior to migration and only maintained connections with one of her sisters after she moved away. She has not spoken to her mother and other siblings since moving to Canada and over the years she has not tried to reach out to these family members neither has not visited her home country since she moved away. Her sister-in-law was pivotal in making her feel welcome into her new community and she continues to maintain a relationship with her although she has moved away from the rural town into the City.

Findings

Three main themes emerged from the thematic analysis that illustrate elements of the family life courses of participants (Figure 1). These are: the extent to which family relationships post-migration are based in choice or obligation (Theme 1); support that is received and support provided (Theme 2); and family membership and meaning and how these shift over time (Theme 3). The themes and sub-themes are depicted as overlapping to signify that these aspects of participants' family lives are interconnected and that families are created across time.

Figure 1: Themes showing Family Relationships, Support and Membership Across Time



Theme 1: Choosing Relationships

This theme reflects participants connections with family members and how these connections changed across time. Much of the discussion is focused on the period just after migration in which distance presented both challenges and opportunities in creating new ways of family engagement. Challenges are imposed both by distance and by the limited means of communicating at the time, an issue of particular concern with key family members such as mothers. Opportunities come from the ability to choose whether to remain in contact with some family members. There are hints in this theme that some family relationships that were severed early on may be rekindled as part of the evolution of thinking about who are salient family members. There is strong endorsement of families as anchors in participants' sense of belonging.

There are two sub themes: (i) Relationships are based in agency and in obligation (ii) Contact signals relationship importance.

i. Relationships are based in agency and obligation

Remaining in touch with some family members took high priority. In the period following migration, mothers and children, were the key family members with whom it was important to connect and to reassure. There is a sense that the centrality of this relationship was assumed. It was not whether they would stay in touch but how they would do so.

Reassurance that they were okay was important in remaining connected to mothers who were key figures in participants family life course. Early on, the main contact was letters; over time, visits were more possible. Throughout we see the tenacity of participants to make sure mothers remained in their lives.

So, when I left to go abroad, she [mother] thought she'd never see me in her life again. So, she cried for about four days, her friends had to come and stay with her to console her.

They told her, "You'll hear from her eventually". Communication wasn't what it is now.

Well, when I was able to, I would phone, or I would write, you know, to let them know that I'm fine. (Desiree)

You know, we didn't have a telephone to call back then like we do now. My mom didn't have any phone back home, but we have up here [in Canada]. But, but would I send a letter down and say, you know, I'm coming back (Frank).

When visits became possible, negotiating and managing contact with mothers was complex and evolved over time. Developments in communication technology facilitated staying in touch until visits could be arranged. Yet there were frustrations along the way with impediments such as visitor visas and reluctance to travel. Strong bonds to mothers continued until the end of their lives.

So physically, we weren't present, but our property was around her [her mother]. She was comfortable, you know, because she knew from the longstanding relationship we had, that when we settled, she would be visiting us wherever we are, you know. So that was comfortable for her, and we maintained the close relationship. So [I would] talk to her on the phone, because by then, communications were more developed. And I was trying to teach her how to send text or email or what have you, you know. So even when she came here, I would show her, you know, simple functions, you know, so she would marvel at how much communication had changed from her days. (Desiree)

So, they turned her [mother] down [for the visa]. So, I wrote my Member of Parliament. Now, I mean, you know, at the time, I was, you know, I was working in government

administration. I had a good job and my family established and so on. I wrote my Member of Parliament, and I told him how disgusted I was how they treated my mother. Also, one of the things they [the embassy staff] said to her was, "he's adopted, he's not your son anymore". This at a time when the government is encouraging [persons] to find their birth families and so on I think this is really awful. And, and by then I was a Canadian citizen, I said, you know, as a Canadian citizen, I really, really disappointed that the people representing my country out in Jamaica are treating people like this. And anyhow, my Member of Parliament was able to get some response, and, ... they gave her a visa. When she was going home, we packed her up with a whole lot of things. My wife stayed up late in the night making her curtains for her house and all that kind of things. And we did everything, we did the best we could. (Terrence).

Even when she [mother] got sick, I said to her, "come to Canada, you know, I get you some, treatment". And she said, "no". I begged, begged, she said, "No, I'd rather stay and die". And she that she did, she didn't come. (Frank)

I mean, I always stay close to my mom, all through my life, well her life. And, because that's how I grew up. I grew up as her main anchor, more so than they [my siblings]. I'm a middle child so I always played that kind of role in her life. (Desiree)

Remaining connected because family members were caring for children who they left behind was very important. Keeping contact with children was done 'no matter what' and being reunited with children was a goal. Although leaving their children behind was difficult, participants felt

that this was the right thing to do as they were not completely sure of the situation that they were coming to in Canada and the children would be safe.

Well, my daughter was still with my mother then. So, it was really important to keep that connection no matter what...I did find that there was sometimes a disconnect with my daughter because she was bonding more with my mother. And you know, that's to be expected. It was good for her, but you don't just come back and fix everything back to day one again. It doesn't quite work that way. But yeah. We reunited, she came here, and my mother came. (Jennifer)

I left him [her son] with his grandmother at the time which was his father's parents. I supported my son, while he was in [home country], I always called to make sure he was okay. I used to send money to take care of him (Tilly).

While migration highlighted relationships that had to be maintained, there also is a sense of choice related to others. Participants had varying types of relationships with family members before migrating, which could be characterized as distant (uninterested, with minimal contact), close (devoted and close), or hostile (conflictual and resentful). Relationships that were close prior to migration largely remained so following the move to Canada. Emotional as well as physical distance gave participants space to decide whether to maintain connections with relatives. The quality of relationships prior to migration influenced decisions about post-migration connections. There was a sense of agency in choosing positive relationships among close kin.

I am the oldest of seven children. But my mom and dad weren't married. And she was married to her other children's dad. My mom and I didn't get along, she always ahm... put

me down and things like that. Even when I came to Canada, she would write me dirty letters...My mother did not treat me like I was her first born. She always reminded me that I should take the lowest seat in the house because I am not her husband's child. So, I always have that feeling as I am just partially accepted, or I am only convenient to them when they need something. And two of my younger sisters treated me like that, a lot of times. So, I didn't bother with her or them. (Angela)

While she did not have a relationship with her mother and two of her three sisters, she remained in touch with one of her sisters.

I would call and see how they were doing. I would call, my sister, I am the oldest of seven children for my mom. I would call her [sister] and see how they were doing and so on. I always called her at the school where she was teaching. So, we connected that way.

(Angela)

At times, even when contact was sought with close kin, efforts were rebuffed. Choosing relationships was not always possible. For James, family tensions among his siblings and his then-spouse prior to migration impacted his connections with family:

My siblings, my brothers, and sisters, [pause] we didn't have a great relationship with him [his father]. When our mom died, it was a couple years later that [my dad] remarried. And our stepmother we didn't, [pausing] we didn't like her. We didn't have a good relationship with her. She didn't have a good relationship with the family for whatever reasons. So, he left the home and went to live with her after getting married...So for a long time it was just us, me and my siblings taking care of each other. [When I got married] we went through a number of situations, my family and myself and my ex-wife, during that time. As a result, the relationship became strain. So, I was not in

too much contact with them for the first few years that I was here. I sent a couple of birthday cards to my two sisters, but they never did reciprocate [write back] to that
(James)

Obligations were not necessarily based in a particular relationship. Early in the post-migration phase of the family life course, there was a sense of overall responsibility for maintaining relationships with family members. This softened over time, so that later in the family life course, participants talked of wanting a sense of belonging and of valuing family and of seeking a sense of belonging. Family connections provided a sense of security and signalled they were not alone.

I make it a duty to reach all of them, even extended family. You know, that was that was a goal I've set out, you know, to reach out to some of the people who I haven't spoken to in years, you know. Family, cousins, whatever, you know, because they are so far and wide apart, you know. So, I made a reconnection with a whole bunch of people. Half-sisters, half-brothers, you know, things like that...(John)

I value the connection [with my family]. I try my best to stay connected to them. I also have other family too that are more because of my adopted family. I have other extended family from my [birth] father's side and I keep in touch with some of those people. So, I just value family. And so even in this country, there's a whole group of my father's family that are here in Canada, they're spread out mostly in Ontario. And I've tried to connect with them as well, too. It's just, I don't know, some people value family more than others. I, I really value those connection, that sense of belonging, I guess. (Terrence).

When you maintain the close connections you reinforce your family, [it shows] how much value they've given to your life. (Desiree)

Well first no man is an island. I like to maintain contact and I've got friends, family, all over the world. I like to keep in touch with them. I like to keep in touch with them...

(Novelette)

People who love and care for you and would be there for you no matter what. It means, it provides a sense of security. It's a sense of ahm [pausing] belonging. It means everything to me. (Tilly)

Sibling relationships showed evolving patterns of closeness. Strained relationships at home evolved into parallel lives after migration. Yet later life prompted rethinking of the importance of these relationships 'in the dwindling years of your life'. One reason for reconnecting at that time was wanting to have a kind of family legacy to be passed on to children.

I wasn't as close to my siblings. I have one brother and one sister. And for different reasons, while I was looking after my own world, trying to navigate life under new circumstances, and a new environment, you know, I'm living in a place now where I knew no one no, I have no family. I had no financial strength, or support. And I had to figure out all these circumstances alone. And they were working, living, and working in my home country, and looking after their own lives and trying to mind their own futures. And I wasn't interacting with them as much during that period, as I was with my mom.

(Desiree)

Now that she is older, and her mother has died, she is more connected with her siblings.

You know, you try to stay in touch with people, especially now in the dwindling years of your life, you know. So, I would talk to cousins often or when I can, but I call my siblings

on a more regular basis, you know. So, we have chat rooms, as well. Technology has allowed us to improve on our communication. So, you stay informed about each other's activities or development.

John had similar sentiments about how important it is for him to connect with his siblings and wider family now. These connections were important for him because he felt that it was “important for family to know each other”.

Connecting with my siblings, is important for me, especially now, because are we all grown up and we all have kids. And kids have to know their cousins and their family, especially in these trying times now, with COVID and everything else. We have to share that concern and love for your family, even though I didn't grow up with them all. But I still maintain that kind of connection. I get WhatsApp on a daily basis now, sometimes I'm gotta get up six o'clock in the morning and choose who to send what and who I am sending back to [Laughing]. (John)

It means a lot to me because during the time when I was not in communication with them [siblings], I was constantly thinking about them and you know, wondering what was happening in their lives, there was that void that I experienced. So now that we have developed a very close relationship it has made a tremendous impact on my life. I'm just glad and grateful that I'm alive to, you know, to experience the closeness again that I lost for quite a few years. So it means a lot to me to have this relationship with everyone. I have this desire to be with or be communicating or wanting to know what's happening with them and to tell them of what's happened with me. As I am getting older, I want to cling more to my loved ones. (James)

My siblings are in the States. We have a very good relationship. We talk often. At least twice a week, I call my sisters. We've actually gotten closer over the years. Because you know we have so much in common and like they come to visit, I go to visit. Like at least once a year I see them. So yeah, I see my sisters, so we're closer, the bond is closer. (Tilly)

ii. Contact signals relationship importance

The maintenance of relationships and networks was not only done via letter and modern communication media. Transnational family visits – either having family members visit them or visiting families in the home country – were seen as important. These visits provided opportunities for participants to see family members, reassure them that they were doing well and facilitate their responsibilities and obligations.

And as soon as I got a little more financially stable, I sent a ticket for her [mother] to come see where I was. I send a ticket from my dad, he came first, you know. So out of the income, I was able to generate to support myself, I was able to send some, something for them to come see where I was, if they wanted to be reassured that I'm safe. (Desiree)

She goes on to talk about other trips her mother made to visit her:

[Later] she came several times to visit, you know, yearly. [Every] summer I would send a ticket for her. I took her all over, traveling with me. You know, camping or whatever I did, you know, with friends. She was always on board, you know, and so sent for her, you know.

Desiree described that these visits not only provided reassurance but also helped to strengthen her relationship with her mother. Now that her mother has passed away she has continued the tradition of visiting, now with her brother:

So, my brother and his wife come every other year, you know. So, I've kept the same, we've kept the same traditions with my brother, you know. He was due to come this year, but because of COVID [and] the airport closure [they could not]. I'm also a frequent visitor, you know... So that's how we've retained the strong family connections. (Desiree)

Family visits were also used as a way of reciprocating past kindness to family members. John shared his delight about having his brother visit him in Canada. With pride John shared that he was able to show him around and create memories with him. He was happy to do this, as his brother always made him feel welcome when he visited.

My last [youngest] brother he lived by himself and we're very close. He came to Canada and visit once, I took him around on my job. In those days, I used to work in the [industry]. I used to be a [job title]. So, I had to go and do audit, and he would ride with me when I go, because they would provide a hotel room for me. So, any hotel room has two beds, you know, and so he was happy to do that with me, you know. I remember, we went up in the gondola, and he was shaking like a leaf [laughing at the memory]. And then he said, well, well, brother, you say we go and we going, if we're going down, we're going down together, you know [laughter]. And these things that, it really reconnected me with that brother, you know, because he's the last one, we are closer. You know, if I go to [visit], even if he doesn't have any money, he will come and look for me, and he will bring a card, or he would go and buy souvenir. (John)

Many participants described how visits helped to enrich their lives and contributed to their wellbeing. For Tilly, family visits were about reconnecting and valuing the people in her life:

You know we have so much in common and I like when they come to visit, or I go to visit. I like to see them at least once per year. It's very important because you don't realize how much you need your family in your life until you're actually without them. You don't realize how much you need help, how much moral support or financial, whatever support it may be, you don't realize how much you need it until you don't have it. (Tilly)

For those participants who did not have strong relationships with their families back home, a return visit provided the opportunity to reconnect and repair broken relationships. James shared how his visit, after being away for over twenty years, helped him to reconnect with his siblings:

I always wanted to have a reconnection with my family, you know. I wasn't comfortable about that [the broken relationship]. And actually, the breaking off of the relationship was because of my ex-wife. That's what really triggered some of the issues that that we had. But as I said, I always wanted to reconnect with them. And when I remarried, my wife, she was the one pushed me to doing something. And so, we both went down, this was in '98, we both went down there and made the reconnection. It was stressful for me in that I didn't know what to expect, you know, on meeting with them. But somehow it just [pausing]... we made a connection, and it was as if we haven't really lost any time really. You know, a lot was said then about how things became strained between us and why and so on. So that was aired you know, we were able air [our differences] and then we moved past it. It wasn't as, as hard as I as I was anticipating. (James)

Theme 2: Receiving and providing support

The second theme, illustrates patterns of support received by participants and support provided by them to family members. Support was not always reciprocal. Across participants, moral support, encouragement and financial assistance were received, and were important aspects of maintaining relationships with key members of their kin networks across time. Through these exchanges, families met some of the everyday needs of members as well as sustaining their kinship bonds. Obligations were reciprocal and support generally was offered in times of need, such as when a member migrated and left a child behind. Whether financial, emotional, or social, support exchanges with kin near and far were significant in the lives of participants. Support was evident at various points across the family life cycle, enabling participants to achieve goals or meet their responsibilities and obligations. In this section I describe the ways participants drew on and supported families under the sub-themes (i) Support is received, but only by some (ii) Support is provided, but under certain conditions.

i. Support is received, but only by some

Receiving material or emotional support from family members was particularly important around the event of migration but also across the family life course. While much of the support came from close family members such as parents and siblings, others who became ‘like family’ also played a role providing support, although somewhat later as these relationships that became ‘like-family’ took time to develop. Support mechanisms included sending money, caring for children left behind, and general encouragement to keep going despite difficulties.

I came to College, [I] enrolled in the [name of program]. The moral support was really important too. You know, because coming up here in those earlier days was like me, myself and I. It was kind of challenging. It was nice, but lonely. Yes, a lot of tears and I'm

telling you I cried a lot of tears. She would say to me, “hold on”, I can recall her saying that to me, “Hold on, just hold on, hold on”. (Frank)

For Novelette, living with her aunt both pre- and post-migration helped her feel settled and provided a stable home for her that she did not have with her mother:

I sort of grew up with my aunt because my mother used to work, and she used to be traveling to different areas. So, for stability, I was with my aunt who never had any children. And then, when I came to Canada that aunt was here. And she was like my second mother. My mother couldn't be bothered, my mother was sort of the selfish type. But my aunt was there, she wanted to know what I was doing school. Anything to do with school, anything I wanted, she would be there to provide for me more so than my mother. She was really interested in what I did in school, and how everything worked out and so on. (Novelette)

Those participants who had children prior to migration relied on families in “*making things work*”. Through child-shifting these participants were able to establish themselves in the new country and build a better life for themselves and their children. Alice describes how her mom support enabled her to return to school and build her life:

My mom literally took my son as her child, and said, now you get back into school. And so, I that's how I ended up back in school. So, I was able to still have a life because my mom took care of my son. So that was an amazing support for me. It..[pauses, reflecting for a bit] didn't stop my life or anything like that. So, I was able to pursue my studies, basically have a young adult life. (Alice)

Tilly had a similar experience. She was able to leave her son with his grandmother when she migrated:

It was teenage pregnancy. So, you know, back then, grandparents... [pauses] when you get pregnant when you're young, you go back to school, and the grandparents took care [of the child]. So, I left him with his grandmother at the time it was his father's parents.

(Tilly)

This arrangement offered her peace of mind and enabled her to settle, knowing her son was safe.

She also talked about how she sent money to the grandparents for her child's care.

Encouragement from other family members also helped her to survive a difficult marriage:

So, it wasn't the best marriage. So that part of my life was very, very dramatic, very, it was a lot of trauma. Ahm and in ways I would not want to experience again but ahm, yeah it was very lonely. And I needed all the support I could have had at that time. Cause, you don't really know someone until you actually live with them. So, then I relied on my friends and my sisters for support. They supported me by just encouraging me to hang in there and showing me the benefits of hanging in there at that time because I had given up everything in [home country]. So, there is no point going back. And so, just pretty much moral support. It wasn't financial support. I married someone who is a provider, but he was emotionally disconnected. (Tilly)

Much of the support that helped maintain important close family relationships was provided to participants. As family needs of participants changed over time, the type of support changed as well. Jennifer relied on her mother to take care of her young child after she migrated. Later, her mother helped Jennifer bring her daughter to Canada, moving with her to assist. Here she highlights the sacrifices her mother made to assist her:

When my daughter was coming, she offered to come. She said, "I will come and help you". So, she came. I was stunned because I didn't think she would, because she was well

established in her community. She had left her business at home, her house, her family. So, she went back, looked after [business] and came right back. So, she helped me settle her.

(Jennifer)

Similarly, Angela's sister-in-law, helped Angela and her son to transition into their new home:

For a person coming from the Caribbean which is still like summer there in November coming to place that all you see is ice. She [sister-in-law] pulled out all the stops for us.

They [sister-in-law and brother-in-law] bought winter clothing, winter shoes for my son and I. And she looked after me as if I was her own daughter. (Angela)

She goes on to say that she could not imagine her life without the help that was provided to her.

Family members were generous in their support even though their own circumstances were limited. Sometimes support was difficult to accept.

I knew that I couldn't look back home for financial support beyond what my dad did when I left, which was to give me a letter, pledging to sell the family home that they lived in, if that need arose, you know, because that is what you had to attach to your application for a student visa. But I knew in my heart of hearts that that I that was something I would never request, you know, I rather go back home than have my family out on the street just to make sure that I could survive here. (Desiree)

My dad would not allow my mother to work. While I was here for a while it was tough. But they helped, my mom is a person who will hold on to a few dollars [save]. You know, [name of country] money at a time too was a lot higher than Canada. So, when she sent me, say \$100 I will get \$200 Canadian. (Frank)

In some instances, people who were “like family” provided tangible support. For Desiree, who was a student, having a good support system of friends meant the world to her and her new “family” supported her in a difficult time:

I'm a student, even though I'm a grad student, money is not like, flowing all around me. So, my friends gathered money. They bought a ticket for me to go home, and they gave me money to bury my dad. You know, that's what my friends did. They're still my friends wherever they live now, they're still all my friends. (Desiree)

Others received no support from family members at home. There was a sense of loneliness in their comments.

In terms of them, them supporting us here. No, we, we struggled. And kids went to school. And as I say, there was no help. There wasn't help from, from [home country] for us. When we came ... you had to find a way to make life, to make a living. (John)

It was stressful, but it you came to realize well, the strength in the group of us is in us being together. Right! You know that because there's no one you can call on or rely on. Any achievement, anything that you hope to achieve had to come from within from, you know. So that was quite different from being back in [home country]. (James)

ii. Support is provided, but under certain conditions

Participants also provided support to family members, most often to immediate family members, and in a few instances, to extended family. Support to family members was primarily in the form of financial assistance. The strong sense of connection to mothers was evident here too. Mothers had not had the opportunities afforded to them.

She was a widow, but her generation had not really been allowed to work in, in their lifetime. You know, they didn't have professions, [the world] was, you know, male oriented. And so, I, when my dad died, I was a student, I assumed responsibility for her support. (Desiree)

I have sent money for my mother. Over the years, she you know, she never had much education.... The only work she's ever done would have been domestic work at different times in her life...I mean, you know, in the early years, I didn't have very much. And certainly, later on, you know... you have a wife at home with little kids, and not a whole lot of spare money. So, you know, you send something when you can. (Terrence)

Ensuring proper burial of a parent was also an obligation. Participants who had lost a family member often went home to be part of the burial ritual. They spoke with pride about being able to return and ensure that their mother and father were “buried properly”.

When my dad died, I was a student, I assumed responsibility for her [mother's] support. So, every month, I would send money for her. I just continued, you know, looking after her needs, because my siblings didn't see that as an equal responsibility. So, I continued till she died, and I buried her. (Desiree)

When my mother died, I took the responsibility for the burial. So, I call on my brothers and sisters and all that and did that. (John)

My mother died last month, and I had to go and bury her. I only just came back. My siblings were there but I knew I had to go and make sure everything was right. This was my responsibility, one final thing..[pausing to reflect]. (Terrence)

Other family members were also supported in various ways. Many participants recounted stories of helping persons back home. None of the participants felt that providing support was something they had to do, but the “*right thing to do*”.

I sent CAD\$500 to help to bring electricity, up the hill from the road to the house.... I was responsible for at least half the cost of bringing electricity from the road up the hill, and it is a little distance up the hill... So you know, I'm probably responsible for three families having electricity right on that little hillside.....It just felt like the right thing to do. I don't know that I felt obligated [to do it]. But you know, particularly when you come to the first world, and we have all these conveniences just all here. So the ability to help to bring that kind of service to your family, it made me feel good. (Terrence)

When my brother got married a few years ago, I told him “well, I can give you some money or I can bring you a new laptop”. He said to bring the laptop. And that laptop is what his son is using now going to [College]. That boy was very bright [smart]. So, I offered to help with his tuition as well. I sent a decent amount of money last year, last fall, to help with his tuition. Not the full amount, but enough to make a big dent in his costs. (Terrence)

I have over the years helped one of my sisters financially. I have also done little bit of financial support especially to one child. But thank goodness they are not really in dire need of ongoing support financially. (James)

He goes on to talk about assisting his nephew to migrate to Canada. He shared that he “*jumped at the opportunity*” to assist with the migration. For him this was not just about the help provided but that it meant that he had a member of his family living in the same place with him. This has helped to lessen some of the disappointment of not having his siblings visit him. He beamed as he shared:

My nephew, he's living here in Canada, they're quite close to where I am. I helped them move to Canada and I jumped at the opportunity as I was so happy to have another family member want to come here as well. Finally, someone else from my family living close by. We have a good relationship with he and his wife. I'm quite happy about that, that we're so close. (James)

Others created nearby family relationships through their connections with others who became like family and with whom they provided and received support. talked about how the support network facilitated child rearing for both her and her friends:

You know, as they say, it takes more than a village to raise a child, you know. One friend, she was a single mom, too. I've been fortunate to have the education and so I can have one job, and my one job pays my bills, and my one job gives me time with my kids. Well, others have had to do two or three jobs, you know, but in the meantime, if your son wants somebody at his basketball game, you can ask me. Because when you have this informal

tribe, or village or family structure, we cry for each other, we're there for each other kind of thing. (Alice)

Help to family members had its limits.

You know, when I see them, I ask, "are you going to school, what you're doing in school, etc. Okay, you enrolled in that school or whatever, and then I'd help you". But most of them, they would be looking for money. I said, I'm not giving you cash. I'm not gonna say be their support to pay your rent. No, I don't do that. No, I'll say, okay, you're enrolled in a class? Yes. Let me see how you're doing. I always like to see the first report. (Frank)

He goes on to share:

The younger generation of my family down there [home country] like nieces and nephews, they see me as a cash cow. You know Uncle, send me this, send me that and that's a type of relationship the nieces and nephews have. (Frank)

You know, so, for me, it's the people who are with you now. They're supposed to be with you. Whether, you know you talk to them every single day or not. I had a cousin recently called me. You know, I hadn't talked to her for close to 25 years or more. She calls me up and she's crying buckets of tears, asking can I give her some money? Okay, I can give you something. She called me up again [for more money]. I block her. The bottom line is I don't have time for that. I'm sorry. I have not talked to you in years. And the one time you call me you're begging me money. I refuse to let myself be used abused. (Alice)

Family support evolved over time for participants. In the early post-migration years many participants received support from their families. As they became more settled, they were able to provide support. Various forms of support that circulate between the participants and their family members reflect tangible ways of keeping connected across time. Visiting and bearing gifts were part of the ways of “doing family”. Gift giving was expected and significant effort was expended to ensuring that when visiting gifts were taken.

Like when you go back home on vacation, you try and buy something for everybody or somebody at least, you know. You have the people who you will spend money and get a gift for them also because they are expecting that. If I'm going to [home country] there are some of my family that I would make sure and buy something for. It is expected when you come, you will bring something, and it's always a joy to be able to do that. You want to carry something, because it is a joy to carry back something because, you know, people look forward to get something. And it's a joy to go back home. And to get the welcoming, that you expect from your family or your relatives. (John)

Everybody's, happy to see you, you know, you're a bit of a novelty.... And the reality is, you know, you're coming from foreign, so they are looking something. Everybody have their hand stretched out in some way, whether figuratively or not quite, they're hoping you're bringing something. Whether it is some little trinket, or somebody asked you to bring something, they're hoping you're going to leave a small change, a little money or something like that. So, there is a certain element of that. But you know, people are happy to see you, because you've been gone for a while, you grow on you put on some weight. [Laughs] (Terrence)

They send stuff, you know. And so, when I go home, I take stuff for them, you know.

(Desiree)

Through visits, migrants maintained emotional attachments to people and places. Family visitors experienced the migrants' new home and offered the migrant an opportunity to reciprocate the welcome received on visits to the home country. Visits were also a conduit for the giving of gifts, and it was important for them to "carry something for everybody" when they visited, and they generally felt that this was expected by families. For the migrant the receiving of gifts from home helped them access familiar products that they may not be able to acquire in the new home, thus enabling them to maintain the connection not only families but also to the place that they are from.

Theme 3: (Re)-creating family

This theme reflects views of participants on the ways that their families have evolved and what family means to them at this stage in their lives. There is evidence of both agency and obligation in their discussion of how they have constructed their families and on who are its members. These don't always align in ways that are comfortable. On the one hand, families are viewed as kin that have a bond that is closer than friendship. Yet relatives are also viewed as those people you don't choose but have to live with. In contrast, friends are chosen but become 'like-family' when they support you and stay connected to you over time. In this theme we see the ways in which these family and like-family relationships create the structure of the family life course.

This theme has two subthemes: 1) Family composition changes, and 2) Understandings of family change.

i. Family composition changes

As evident from earlier themes, migration resulted in participants rethinking their relationships with family members who were now at a distance. As they settled into their new country, we see a second set of decisions about family connections as participants developed new relationships in the host country. There is both agency and serendipity on the development of these new relationships. Some were developed as participants entered new phases of their families through marriage; some came from seeking new connections as a result of leaving marriages. Many were based in friendships that developed during a period of transitions into their new community. Out of these experiences, participants recreated their families, adding relationships that were ‘like-family’ of people who supported them, celebrated special occasions with them, and often remained an integral part of their family lives.

New relationships through marriage came as a happy surprise. Angela recounts how welcoming her new relatives were:

Well, my husband’s family, they were very good. They were very good to me, especially my sister-in-law. My son and I were the only two brown skinned people in the whole family. She stood by my side and if I need to talk, I would call her and we would talk. She was like my fairy-godmother. She always remembers my birthday even to today. (Angela)

Similarly, James said that his new relatives made him feel like a son:

It was after meeting my wife and after getting married, that I [reconnected with my siblings] back home. But I would say to that, I was fortunate in the sense that [my wife’s parents and siblings] accepted me wholeheartedly. I immediately became like a son, even before getting married. And, you know, as a matter of fact, her mother, on the second

time that we met, she made a remark that I would make an ideal son-in-law. So yeah, so yeah, they did show they did show, you know, full support of me, and our relationship.

(James)

Other relationships were actively sought to support or compensate for difficult family situations.

Tilly looked to new friendships to help her move on from a difficult marriage.

So, I pretty much ran away from Toronto to Edmonton literally... [laughs] to get away from it all [referring to her marriage]. And that's where I started my new family network, I started making friends here [in Edmonton]. It was, it was great, it was good. I came to Edmonton with a friend that my sister knew from [home country] that did not know me but knew of me. So, I asked if I could come to stay with her, she knew my situation and she said sure. So, I came out and then her friend became my friends. Friends I could hang out with, now I could finally go out. Go places, be myself, feel free. Not feel trapped. [laughs] My story is so personal. They support me. You know you just try to put things behind you? So, support was I'm there for you, lets go out, lets have fun. (Tilly)

Alice created close relationships to ensure that she and her children were cared for when relatives were at a distance:

So, I applied for and got a job, and move me and my kids up to [City]. We [and other co-workers] all went up there as single people. I was the only one who had kids. And that's what made me realize that family was the most important thing. So, when it came to Christmas time, everybody would be at my house for Christmas because Christmas is for children. My support network was made up of my colleagues because remember my sister

and her family, they were in Edmonton, the rest of my family was in Toronto, so I have learned to depend or to accept not to depend on but to accept friendships and connections, not just from [name of country] or women or black women, but from all people. (Alice)

These connections made participants feel welcome in the new country and city. For many, lifelong relationships were forged. John's uses the term 'like our family' for these connections that became embedded in his life:

Like when I first came to Edmonton, there's this family who invited us to their home for Christmas. Sometime during the Christmas season, and they had Santa Claus and they had gifts and all that, you know, and they treat us like family, and we maintain that relationship, you know. So anytime they have anything parties, or we have a party at home or whatever, we invite them. So, there are some close friends in Edmonton that are very close to us. Anything we are having anything they will be there. That's basically that's what it is. Yeah, they have become like our family here. Yeah. (John)

We see family language in new relationships that compensated for lack of nearby relatives.

Friends became family.

[Shortly after] I came here, my brother and his family moved back to [name of city]. I was kind of here on my own, alone. And at the time a family, sort of adopted me. They took it upon themselves that since I had no family here, they would be my family. I used to go to their house for all the holidays. And now I'm doing that. I have people over, all the people who don't have families here. This is the place to come for Thanksgiving dinner,

Christmas dinner, Easter dinner. This is the place that they come. But this year, we didn't because a COVID. (Novelette)

I was also very homesick. I wanted to go back home right away, because I felt so isolated in this place where I couldn't find any familiar food. You know, there was one Jamaican patty shop that only sold mini patties. That was it for Caribbean food, period. Nothing else familiar and I wasn't a steak and potatoes person, you know. So, it was a very, very difficult period for me, socially as well as emotionally because I really missed my family a lot. So, I came alone, you know, I managed to survive, you know. So, my friends, the friends I made became my family here.... You know, you can think of it in terms of the quality of your blood. They have enriched my blood, you know, because we've shared so many experiences together... My friends, I would defend in a heartbeat. (Desiree)

ii. Understandings of family changes

Looking back across the broad sweep of their family lives, participants talked about how they had come to understand family. Participants discussed the meaning of family and how they incorporated relatives as well those who became 'like-family'. They talked about families having distinct elements, sometimes described as 'blood family' and 'like-family'. For some, blood family is at the centre:

My family is layered. As you say, I have blood family. I have immediate family. You know, I have my own children...I have my, you know, a spouse. Beyond that I have extended family, my siblings, his siblings. My siblings have produced children. You know... My godchild as well, you know, in the Caribbean context, we do that sometimes we are godparents to friends' or families' children. And so that helps to keep our network

connected. You know, so those are the people that that are still very present constantly in my life... Because my family is my children, you know, my immediate family, my siblings, and their children, and then my friends. So, it's, it's like a flower opening up, you know because I have layers of families you know, where people who have connected with me since we were young. (Desiree)

Well, family for me is my immediate family and all my friends that are close to us in terms of like family, like blood family. We have friends here who treat us like family, close, close friends, you know. I was involved with the cultural association, and I connected with them through that group. So yeah, we have close friends in Edmonton, like family. If there is a wedding or a party, you know, they will invite us, we will invite them. When my daughter got married, they were there. Anything we are having they will be there, close to us. That's basically that's what it is. Yeah, they have become like our family here. (James)

While 'blood family' was always included, choice was important. For some, lack of emotional closeness to kin meant that they were just people that the participant was related to.

Family does not mean blood for me. Family means love, family means caring... I can't choose my siblings because they came, and they're there, but I can choose my friends, and when I choose my friends, I choose the friends who are supportive, and we support each other, and I call them my tribe, you know, because these are the people I want to be with. It is important and especially when you travel around... Family is important to me. I don't even want to use family because they think family, you you're joined by blood, I

like to say my tribe, I say, I'm taking my tribe with me, I'm taking my village with me, if I can bring my whole village with me, I'm bringing my village. Because when you have this informal tribe, or village or family structure, where we cry for each other, we're there for each other kind of thing. (Alice)

My husband, my friends [are my family]. I've had a friend here that I met in 1985 and she's still my friend, she is my family. So, my friends have become like family. I have people that they are really like family. We're as close as, as I am close to my sisters. Yeah, when you say like family, well, you feel the same bond, you're, you feel a closeness to them, a form of loyalty and love to them that you feel the same way for your sisters. As a matter of fact, friends can sometimes be better than even your blood relatives. I have this philosophy where that, you don't have to be blood related to be family. And I have met some amazing people since I'm here, that I would even maybe say they're just as close as my sisters. In terms of just being loyal and faithful. Being there for me from day one, supported me, you know, helped me to babysit my daughter, you know, that, yeah, they are as close as family or even better. (Tilly)

Late-life families were not uniformly large and diverse. In the absence of agency and active cultivation of new family relationships, and in the face of strained relationships with kin, family membership dwindled over time.

Ah goodness... [reflecting] You know, it is sad but at this stage of my life I am finding family is getting thinner and thinner. And the reality is some people die, like that very dear friend of mine. Ah, people move away, people have different interests and so ahm...

family, family is a much tighter, smaller group at this stage of my life than maybe it was in ah, maybe twenty years ago. I have three children. I have two grandsons. I have two sons-in-law. I have siblings from my natural family in Jamaica, who in some ways sometimes we're estranged because I really didn't grow up with them. But you still have that connection. I have family here, my adopted family. But again, we just don't have that bond that we had ah many years ago. (Terrence)

Actually... I would call my son and my daughter and, my three grandchildren but mainly one of my grandchildren my family because they're the one who will contact me. And if I need something they will bring it to me. And my church family. You know but with the church family we are not that close except in the spirit. (Angela)

Chapter 6: Discussion, Implications and Conclusions

This study explored older adults' accounts of their family relationships across time. Findings presented here facilitate an understanding of how family membership and relationships are nurtured, supported, changed and navigated. Together, they add to our knowledge of family life courses, giving us an insider view of how individuals shape their family lives and in turn are shaped by them. This chapter highlights contributions of the study to theoretical and empirical knowledge on family life courses. It provides implications for the future research needed to see the ways in which family lives might unfold across the cultural diversity of Canada's population. There is no assumption of a uniform family life course.

In this study, migration provided the window into the family lives of older persons from the Caribbean. Consistent with the assumption that life course events result in transitions in roles and relationships (Carr, 2018; Edmonston, 2013; Hofferth & Goldscheider, 2016), the event of migration prompted thinking by participants about family membership; about which family relationships were most salient; about which were obligatory and which could be left behind. Migration required developing strategies for giving and receiving support across the distance imposed by moving to a new country and managing the disappointment that occurred when support was not offered by family members left behind or when the support participants offered was rebuffed. During the early period after migration, these families were decidedly transnational. While migration was not the story, it prompted the story that unfolded over the course of this research and across the lives of participants.

In the next sections of the discussion, I talk about what the results have revealed about the three elements of family life courses represented in the thematic findings presented in chapter

5 and summarized in figure 1. I highlight their contributions to knowledge and how together they paint a picture of family membership, connections and meaning. Theoretical contributions and questions are raised by these analyses are presented throughout.

Choices and obligations in family relationships

Across the unfolding family life course, we see actions by participants in crafting relationships with kin. Relationships that may have been taken for granted or endured even though they were difficult, across time were allowed to fade to the background, or become more prominent or were severed. The salience of connections with mothers was powerful, perhaps reflective of the matriarchal culture in which they were embedded. Other relationships, such as those with siblings rose in prominence; others were forged out of the experiences with a supportive network of non-kin.

Family relationships can play a significant role in facilitating transitions in both tangible and intangible ways. However, these relationships were not automatically maintained nor necessarily a source of ongoing support. This research illustrates that the maintenance of family connections is not done solely to keep families intact but also to reflect the value placed on these relationships at various points in the family life course.

Results show that relationships are maintained with family members for whom there is a strong sense of obligation. Mothers' centrality to the family connections in the early post-migration period reflected their continued importance in families, and challenges the notion of migration as fracturing and severing family ties (Stone et al., 2005). Indeed, it reveals much about how Caribbean matrifocal family practices continued to influence ideas about family relationships beyond the local context, signalling the pervasiveness of some practices and processes involved in "doing family". Participants efforts to maintain connections signaled their

commitment to sustain ties through emotional and social bonds between the home and destination country (Kilkey et al., 2018; Mazzucato & Schans, 2011).

Studies on transnational families have highlighted exchange of caregiving or support (tangible and intangible) (Baldassar et al, 2016; Fog Olwig, 2012). Findings from this study add to these findings with insights into which relationships are important and the maintenance of these connections. Participants had a range of connections with proximate and extended family relations during the pre-migration period. These family relations were marked by frequent contacts because of the relatively small community context in which participants lived. Distance disrupted these everyday contacts.

From a life course perspective, we begin to see how family relationships and patterns of connections are structured across time and that at different points in the life course motivations, intensity and opportunities for these relationships change. Life course perspective indicates that the lives of family members are linked across the life course (Elder et al., 2003; Settersten, 2018). According to the linked lives principle, people's lives are embedded in a network of social relationships with significant others (Settersten, 2018; 2015). Findings from this dissertation add understanding about how lives are linked and, indeed if they remain linked across time. Importantly, the quality of family relationships may either facilitate or hinder family members desire or need to maintain these relationships across time. We see evidence, for example, of how indifferent or even hostile responses from family members provided the impetus for participants to sever ties. Relationship obligations and quality underpin the linkage of lives across time. Links to mothers were strong, based on cultural norms of matrilineal focus, while links with those with whom relationships were fraught or were not central were relinquished after migration.

Notwithstanding connections with members of their close and extended family network prior to migration, in the post-migration period, participants became judicious about their relationships, moving away from some and adding others. Both life course and social convoy perspectives speak to with this finding of shifting relationships across time (Connidis & Barret, 2018). There is evidence that convoys are shaped by personal and situational factors (Antonucci et al., 2014; Antonucci et al., 2010), including normative expectations about the compositions of convoys at different points in the life course (Fuller et al, 2020). Findings from this study provide examples of the circumstances under which people are removed and added to the convoy as well as why relationships with those in the convoy may recede, remain or become more central at different points in the life course. For example, normative expectations about close connections to mothers were enacted in the early phases of the post-migration family life course and siblings became more central later in life when participants looked to same generation kin who share family history. We have yet to understand how members are linked in situations in which other factors, such as political unrest or climate change results in forced migrations and severing of family connections.

The limited contact with siblings was a feature of the mid-stages of the family life course. It reflected the focus of participants and their siblings on their partners and children. Investments in sibling relationships also could have been influenced by their relationship quality prior to migration, or by distance. Research by Eriksen and Gerstel (2002) found that distance may act as a barrier to feelings of closeness and intensity of contact with siblings.

A return to more intense sibling relationships as participants aged was a feature of the rhythm of the family life course. Consistent with research on sibling relationships in later life (Blieszner & Ogletree, 2018; Stocker et al, 2020), participants regarded these relationships as

some of the most important to them in later life, a space for reciprocal emotional support more than the provision of tangible resources. Sibling relationships have been described as one of the most enduring ties in the life course. Their very longevity means that they are subject to change over the life course (Baldassar & Brandhorst, 2021). My research offers additional insight into how sibling relationships evolve, showing that when solid enough they can be allowed to drift to the background but can become more central in later life.

The research shows that relationship quality and choice affected participants network of relationships across time, including who they were connected to and when. Findings illustrate that some people in family convoys may be more central at particular points in the life course. This research has also provided examples of the circumstances under which people are central and why relationships with those in the convoy may recede, remain or become more or less central at different point in the life course.

The examination of family relationships using life course perspective and social convoy model has been useful in several ways. Most important is that it shows that families are settings in which individuals change to meet their needs across time. As we examine personal and life course experiences we begin to see how the maintenance, formation and severing of family relationships are individual and situational, both of which are important in understanding who people remain connected to over time, recognising that while people may experience freedoms and constraints in their relationships.

Paying dues and reaping benefits in families

The ways in which participants provided support and received it from others was an important theme in discourses about how family connections were maintained, enhanced and in some cases relinquished. Researchers have argued that migrants should not be viewed as

“isolated actors” because the decision to leave one’s country is “is nested in networks of significant others” (Ryan, 2019, 187). Whether family members are a catalyst for migration or a source of support afterwards, research evidence points to the maintenance of family relationships post-migration and the practices in doing family across distance (Baldassar et al, 2007; Boccagni, 2015). The relationships among family members and the exchange of resources while rooted in a sense of obligation are also reliant on members’ ability to affirm connections in this way. However, despite evidence that migration heightened a sense of obligation to maintain some family relationships and support practices, distance offered choices as well. The study highlights the context under which family relationships and support exchanges are sustained.

Findings show that support exchanges were reconfigured after migration, practices were transformed, and this gave participants some ability to exercise choice in their relationships and how they would do family through these exchanges. The receipt of support in the early migration phase helped the participants to become stable and established. Most migrants were able to exercise their choice how and to whom support was provided as they became more established in the new country. The exception was with mothers and children left behind where a sense of obligation influenced their provision of support regardless of the difficulty in doing so.

Human ecology theory facilitates an examination of the importance of family contexts of people across the life course. The main contribution of this study is in understanding family environments, illustrating what Baldassar (2007b) has described in relation to migrant families as practices and processes through which families maintain relationships and circulate resources. These practices are part of what others have called doing family – activities members use that reinforce a sense of familyhood across time (Morgan, 2011a, 2011b; Skrbis, 2008). Findings

from this study illustrate some the challenges and opportunities of doing family across distance and creating family relationships with people nearby.

Through participants' accounts we begin to see the ways that they and their family members engaged in longstanding and adapted practices. For example, gift giving became a more deliberate effort when visiting, with gifts taking on new importance in signaling family relationships. In the face of spending less time with family members, the importance of these practices was heightened for them.

Participants placed high value on the interpersonal work and activities of creating and maintaining family ties but also family meaning. Visiting or having family members visit them in Canada, were important events in the unfolding of the family life course, creating a sense of belonging and identity (Marschall, 2017), and a means of meeting family obligations and expectations. Being present for family rituals, such as burials and gift giving, was an important part of "doing family", and a way to remain connected to family members. Burial of parents was done because of a sense of duty as well as lagged reciprocity, described by Silverstein, et al., 2002, as repayment for support in earlier life. These findings support research by Walsh (2018), who found that social expectations influence the actions of family members and the ways that they engage in displays of familyhood.

Doing family via visits was not always easy. Travelling was not always possible, and in some instances, family members did not want to or could not travel. Therefore, visiting as a mechanism for doing family was sometimes one-sided. Other family processes such as letter writing and financial or emotional support were important but not sufficient ways of staying connected. Decisions about what should be done on visits and with whom signalled which were important relationships. Visits were filled with expectations, as family members anticipated

receiving gifts from the migrant. Moreover, these visits served as further confirmation to family members that participants were doing well. Distance alone was not the primary factor in determining family support and ways of doing family. Instead migrants display of family ties were also bound up in relationship quality, the value placed on signalling the importance of these relationships and in the extent to which there was choice in sustaining relationships. We still have much to learn about how exercising choice in relationships and doing family affect family convoys across time.

Shifting boundaries around 'who is family'

Conceptualizations of family membership have most often been rooted in the structural changes that families experience (births, marriage, divorce, death) over the life cycle. Increasingly, families are viewed less in relation to these structural changes and more in terms of their everyday practices and processes that bind them together. As participants were settling into their new home, in the absence of proximate family members connections with others who became like-family grew in importance. These relationships were formed in the early migration phase and were pivotal in providing tangible support, such as child care and money, as well as intangible emotional support. People who became like-family at particularly vulnerable junctures in the migrant's life, became long-term members of their family convoys. Migrants' ideas of family were redefined through these experiences that created lifelong bonds, a finding that resonates with Bryceson and Vuorela's (2002) argument that transnational families "have to construct their notion of family and its emotional and economic utility more deliberately, rather than taking it for granted" (p. 15). The incorporation of people who were like-family was one facet of (re)creating family.

Relationships that are like-family have been found to provide supports and may serve as a substitute for blood relationships (Braithwaite et al., 2010; Johnson, 1999). In the Netherlands

for instance 22% of families reported having like-family connections (Voorpostel, 2013), while in the United States Taylor and colleagues (2013) found that African Americans and persons of Afro-Caribbean decent were more likely to report having like-family relationships. The relationships have been identified as important supportive networks for migrants as they settle into their new home (Taylor et al., 2017) and navigate responsibilities in the home country (Baldassar et al., 2014).

The migration transition in this study included many stressful experiences that participants had to negotiate, often without the presence of other family members. Over the course of this study, it became clear that the participants' experiences of creating relationships that were like-family was deliberate. For some, seeking and embracing such connections grew out of their loneliness; for others it was out of a need to have people in their lives who could form that supportive group around their children or to have the unconditional support that members of this network provided. These findings add to what Ryan (2011) identifies as the diverse ways that migrants "access, maintain and construct different types of networks, in varied social locations, with diverse people" (p. 707). Relationships with people who were like-family were crucial for staving off the challenges of the transition to a new place, marked by the evolutions of ideas of who is family.

Findings from this research have demonstrated that these older adults are actively involved in shaping their family relationships and structure. Reflecting on who is family and the relevance of connections at different points in time allowed participants to focus their energies on those relationships that were mutually beneficial. These reflections gave the participants mental, emotional and physical space to come to terms with the status of their various relationships post-migration, and determine who would belong to their family moving forward.

The research has added new information on family networks in migrants' lives, showing that relationships are not merely relevant because of their potential to mitigate challenges. These like-family relationships are not transient but are rooted in deeply personal experiences that bind people across time. Findings also align with concepts of linked lives, highlighting the fluidity of relationship quality over time (Elder, 1994; Hofferth & Goldscheider, 2016). The circumstances under which like-family connections were experienced and connections with kin were dropped or maintained or revitalized across time provided context for participants to reflect on the meaning of family, broadening of their ideas in later phases of their family life course.

This research provides evidence that family relationships are grounded in more than kinship ties, and how a group of people who have experienced migration engage in a process of actively defining and redefining family across the life course. Family is not a static constellation of relationships but derives meaning from members' active engagement in, experiences of, and ideas about what is and who is family over time (Cox & Paley, 2003). This study extends knowledge about families by highlighting the ways that the behaviour and agency of members, their interdependence and meaning-making processes, are part of the choices they make in shaping their families. Importantly, it shows that people evolve ideas of family to meet their circumstances, in some instances adopting family forms and practices from their home countries to meet their needs in Canada.

Summary

Families are often viewed through the structured transitions which result in growth (marriage, birth/adoption of children) and contraction (divorce, death) across time. This study has begun to shed light on other ways families change over time, beyond such transitions. The study begins to address questions raised about family diversities (Nelson & Colaner, 2018; Ó Súilleabháin, 2017), illustrating some of the ways of doing family.

Through this study, I have come to better understand the life course concept of linked lives and the role of convoys in family life courses. What emerged from the study is that linked-lives are an ongoing feature of family life, but the ways that family lives are linked are dependent on several factors, including relationship quality and choice. As a result, there is no single family convoy that moves with the person across the life course. Instead we see that convoys are reconfigured, with some members being removed altogether while others are added; and we begin to see some of the circumstances that contribute to these changes. Importantly, the research provides insight into how family context (the relationships among members) as well as the context in which families exist influence how people do families. As we examine families in context it is important to acknowledge that the experiences of members are shaped by their environment in ways that we do not yet fully understand. Deliberate actions and behaviours such as forming like-family relationships and relinquishing poor kin relationships influence family life course. This research shows that there is significant work involved in maintaining families across borders and crafting family life courses.

Implications

In both the family and transnational literature, the salience of family bonds has been highlighted, underscoring how these bonds reflect emotional connections, support adaptability, and provide a strengths-based context for migrant families. Through detailed accounts of participants' experiences of connections and support with their family members, findings from this study have illustrated ways that ideas of family are embedded in the various experiences of family life in both the home and receiving countries. Participants in this study encountered new situations and experiences as they adjusted to the new country and many of these were mediated by whether supports were available and how they were utilized.

Practice Implications

Some researchers on transnational families have argued that migrants and their family members are resilient, and their relationships are marked not solely by the fracturing and severing of ties (Stone et al., 2005). Others concur, finding that family members separated by distance remain connected with each other through their “retained sense of collectiv[e] and kinship” ties (Baldassar & Merla 2014, p.6). In this study I add to this knowledge on how family relationships evolve over time and why they might do so.

These findings suggest that professionals working with new migrants would be best able to provide support if they come to understand relational issues that migrants are working through with their family systems. Professionals, therefore, need to be sensitive about how they position ideas and notions of families, avoiding discourses of families as invariably supportive and available. Findings from this study of family relationships across time can help professionals plan interventions that are reflective of migrants’ needs and circumstances, thus developing interventions and strategies that will support migrants. Professional working with families may find it useful to adopt an ecological framework for gathering information and developing insight on the networks available within an individual’s near and distal environment to assess the resources available and how these might be utilized for client outcomes.

In my study, there was evidence that later life connections with siblings was central and was facilitated by Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Results from a study of older adults’ ICT use in the United Kingdom and Canada showed that having facilitators (through work or other supports) to assist with adapting to the new technology enabled increased usage and confidence in using the technology (Ramsden Marston, et al., 2019). Not all older migrants have engaged in work that required the use of a computer or are from contexts where the infrastructure to support ICT is well developed. Therefore, programs and interventions for

older adults need to recognize the unevenness in the availability, comfort and use of technology, and how this can potentially truncate connections in later life with family members who are separated by international borders. Additionally, the study shows that access to and capacity to use ICT devices and applications are central to facilitating later life connections. Considerations need to be given to migrants from contexts where ICT is not well developed or widely available and how this may impact connections, information sharing, or the ability to virtually participate in family rituals in later life.

Policy Implications

Findings of flows of support and relative ease of maintaining connections are based in part on participants in the study being relatively privileged. They all arrived in Canada via government-approved immigration programs which facilitated the legality of their arrival and subsequent residence. They were able to travel freely between Canada and the home country. However, this did not result in them being independent of need for support or feeling more secure when they arrived in Canada. Regularized status should not be considered as synonymous with being stable, embedded in a supportive family and having support needs met.

International migrants must navigate migration policy barriers, which can be a financially and emotionally costly. Ideally, family reunification programs that are part of immigration policies would go beyond supporting the reunification of spouses, children and parents. Canada's immigration policy does not allow for sponsorship of other family or like-family relationships that are important to migrants. Through these practices, immigration policies are defining membership in migrant families, and giving little credence to who are important family members in migrants' lives.

Research Implications

The current study enhanced understanding of the processes by which older Caribbean migrants (re)created and maintained family bonds across time. Findings from this research indicated that family relationships are dynamic and are negotiated and (re)defined across the family life course. The major themes from the research highlighted the processes involved in maintaining relationships (family structure); giving and receiving support (operationalizing or doing family) and determining who is family (conceptualizing family).

This work builds upon previous research related to migrants family life. Findings further underscore recent work on family diversity (Keating et al., nd). As we acknowledge the diversities that exist within and among families, there still much to be learned about their formation, maintenance and support of connections in these various families across Canada. A next study on family life courses of migrants might be with families of migrants who have arrived as refugees and for whom maintaining transnational family connections may not be possible. Further research is also needed to explore relationship salience at different points in the life course, and how these can be leveraged over time to support later life needs. The role of like-family connections emerged as a one of the major themes in the data, however there is still much to learn about how these connections and networks function over time in the lives of different families – families who experience precarious jobs; LGBTQ2S families; indigenous families.

Evidence from this study supports previous research that migration does not invariably truncate family ties (De Haas, 2010; Mazzucato & Schans, 2011; Stone et al., 2004), but family members engage in (re)negotiation of their families ties across time. There is need for multi-site longitudinal research about these experiences from the perspective of both migrants and their family members – those who remain in the home country as well as those who move elsewhere. Such research can provide insights into how families are evolving along with their shifting

importance in people's lives across time and how these shifting perspectives might differ across cultures and contexts. Additionally, these studies could also map shifting family contours and how these affect long term outcomes for members. Issues to be explored by these studies include what are the long-term benefits of these changing ideas and structures of family for different members.

This thesis has made contributions to our understanding of transnational and family life course research. However, many questions remain about migrants and their family lives. Exploring these issues will require a collective effort and commitment of researchers from multiple disciplines to explore emerging questions. Further research is needed to explore the intersections between family and migration for older undocumented migrants, ethnically diverse migrants, as well as the role of gender in shaping migration experiences.

Concluding observations and reflections

As shared in my researcher's narrative, I too am a migrant. My experiences provided me with insights into the lives of the participants and common ground on which to initiate the exploration of their experiences. Being a migrant provided me with an "insider" status which guided not only my decision to undertake this research but also why I chose to do so. For me, deciding to undertake this project and the process of doing so is an important step in building knowledge about family diversities and understanding about people's experiences of families.

Like all studies with a qualitative design, the findings of this study are not generalizable. That was not the intent. My contact with participants was limited. Because of pandemic restrictions, interviews could only be undertaken over Zoom, email and telephone exchanges to clarify the content of their stories. The use of a virtual platform excluded participants who did not have the technology available to them or who were not comfortable navigating such spaces.

This meant that there were prospective participants who met the inclusion criteria but who could not participate because the methods used to transmit information and conduct the study was inaccessible to them.

Of the more than 25 older adults who were invited to participate in the study, 10 accepted the invitation to participate. I am confident that participants' histories of family connections and willingness to share provided a basis for good quality data applicable to the research topic, and from which I analyzed the data, identified themes and illustrated patterns of family life. This is a solid beginning but there is much more to be done.

The study included older migrants from the Caribbean living in Alberta, Canada where there were few other migrants from the region. The experiences of other older migrants from the Caribbean living in other regions in Canada where there is a Caribbean diaspora or other culturally diverse older migrants may differ. Similarly, projects that include people at different phases of their family life course would provide additional perspectives to those gained from retrospective reporting of family life across time.

Findings of this study illustrate that family relationships are dynamic and are not bounded by households or nation states. While participants maintained relationships with some family members, they also engaged in a process of (re)negotiating these relationships over time. Through their reshaping of their ideas of family, the older migrants in this study created ways to deal with stresses and challenges in their new home and cultivate supportive networks, which included kin and non-kin and which shifted over time. This willingness to actively engage in network (re)building reflects a level of resilience, and the importance of having a unit that one can identify and connect with that provides protective mechanisms and support across time.

This study presents the relational issues and processes migrants face in their family relationships post-migration. There is more work to do in developing better understandings of migrants' families and relationships over time. I hope that the participants stories have raised questions and sparked additional interest in migrants and their post migration transitions. In contemporary societies, families are undergoing significant changes, however their relevance in people's lives – either through extended family connections, families of choice, or like family relations – remain. Similar to my journey of discovery in undertaking this research, I hope the reader has developed additional appreciation for the complexities and varied experiences that shape family relationships across time.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Letter to Participants

Good Day,

My name is Shanika Donalds and I am a PhD student in the Human Ecology Program at the University of Alberta. For my doctoral thesis, I am conducting research to understand Caribbean migrants' experiences of maintaining connections with their family members who remain in their home country.

I am inviting you to participate in my study because I believe your story is important to helping me understand this experience. If you choose to participate we can arrange a mutually convenient time for us to meet either by telephone or online (using Zoom). I will provide all the information required to access the Zoom meeting if you choose this option. Our conversation will last approximately 90 minutes. I will ask you a series of questions about your migration history. I will also ask you about whether you provided and or received support from your family in your home country. Moreover, I will be asking you to talk about how important these connections are, and have been over your time in Canada. With your consent, I will do an audio recording of our interview.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are not obligated to answer any of my questions if you feel uncomfortable responding to them. Furthermore, you can withdraw from the interview at any point (even if you agreed to participate earlier, you can still change your mind) and I will destroy any information you gave me.

There is a small risk that you might feel uncomfortable sharing your experiences and/or opinions. If this happens you can discontinue the interview if needed. Also, if you would need to talk with someone about the distress you feel, I have a list of agency resources that I can share with you who will be able to help you to process these feeling. There are no direct benefits to you, however your interview will make an important contribution to the overall understanding of transnational families in Canada.

Your privacy is paramount and will be respected. I will make every effort to make sure that what you say is kept confidential. Your name, identity and anything we discuss will be held in strict confidence. All information I collect from you will be stored in my password-protected computer. I will be the only person with access to your interview files, but my supervisory committee members may ask to see them. Any contact details you have provided (name, address and telephone number) will be stored separately from your information. At the end of the research project, I will present the findings in my doctoral thesis. In addition, I will publish articles out of the research and present aspects of the research at conferences. In all cases all identifying information will be removed. In instances where I use direct quotes for example, all your identifying details, so that these quotes cannot be linked to you.

Following our initial interview, I will contact you for a follow up interview or to clarify anything that might still be unclear to me. This follow up interview will also take place at a time convenient to you. Even after this point, you can withdraw from the study, provided that you notify me within two weeks of your interview date. After this time, your information will have been de-identified and it will be impossible to remove it from the pooled data.

When the research is finished, I will be happy to provide you with a summary report of its results. If you wish to receive electronic copies of the report or papers published from this study please provide me with your email address.

Since we will be meeting virtually or by telephone I will ask you to verbally consent to be part of the research. As outlined above, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and can opt not to answer any questions. You are also free to ask for clarification and or new information throughout your participation.

The Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta (Pro00103481) has reviewed the plan for this research for its adherence to ethical guidelines. If you have questions about your rights or how research should be conducted, you can call (780) 492-2615. This office is independent of the researchers.

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, please contact either:

Researcher: Shanika Donalds
Department of Human Ecology
University of Alberta
shanika@ualberta.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Janet Fast
Department of Human Ecology
University of Alberta
jfast@ualberta.ca.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this request.

Appendix B – Informed Consent

Informed Consent Form

Project: Linked Lives: Life courses of family connections of older Caribbean migrants living in Canada

Research Investigator: Shanika Donalds, PhD. Candidate, Department of Human Ecology, University of Alberta, Email: shanika@ualberta.ca

Research Supervisor: Dr. Janet Fast, Professor, Department of Human Ecology, University of Alberta, Email: jfast@ualberta.ca

The following questions will be reviewed with participants as part of the verbal consent process:

- Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study?
- Have you received a copy of and read (or someone has read to me) the Information Letter?
- Do you understand the benefits and risks of taking part in the study?
- Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason and if you wish your data to be withdrawn from the study you must notify the Research Investigator within two weeks of the interview?
- Do you understand who will have access to the information that you provide?
- Have you had an opportunity to ask questions about this study?
- Do you voluntarily agree to participate in this study?
- Do you understand that your data will be kept for a minimum of 5 years?
- Do you agree to have your interview(s) audio recorded?

The Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta (Pro00103481) has reviewed the plan for this research for its adherence to ethical guidelines.

Appendix C – Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Initial open-ended prompt: I would like to hear about your experience of being a migrant and whether or not you have maintained connections with your families in your home country since migrating. You can tell your story in any way you feel comfortable, perhaps beginning with telling me a bit about your migration experience, and then your relationships with your families since then.

Could you start by telling me a little about yourself and how you came to be living in Canada?

The questions below will be used as prompts to explore aspects of participants' stories more deeply or to gain clarification.

1. Could you talk about your decision to migrate to Canada? Who or what influenced your decision to move to Canada?
2. When you first moved to Canada, what was your experience of this new country? How did you cope with these experiences? Who or what helped you to cope with these experiences?

I would like you to tell me about your family in your home country.

1. Could you talk about your family back home and the ways you have remained connected to them?
2. Could you tell me about the ways in which your family back home has supported you in the time you have lived in Canada? How important was this for you as a new migrant? How important is this for you now?
3. Could you tell me about the ways in which you have supported your family back home? How important was this for you as a new migrant? How important is this for you now?

You have been living in Canada for _____ years away from your family

1. Can you tell me what does remaining in touch and supporting your family in your home country over the years mean to you? OR Can you tell me what does not being contact with your family in your home country mean to you?

Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your story?

Appendix D – Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Questionnaire for Participants

I would like to start by asking a few background questions

1. Age _____
2. Gender _____
3. Country of Birth _____
4. What is your marital status?
 - Married and/or living with partner
 - Divorced
 - Separated
 - Never married
 - Widowed
 - Other _____
5. Do you have children? If yes, how many? _____
6. What is the highest level of formal education that you have completed?
 - Elementary school _____
 - High school _____
 - Diploma from college or trade school _____
 - University degree _____
 - Post-graduate degree _____
 - Other (please specify) _____
7. Can you tell me about your current employment status? Are you:
 - Working at a full-time job
 - Working at a part-time job
 - Other _____
 - Retired
 - Unemployed
8. When did you move to Canada? _____
9. When did you move to Edmonton? _____
10. What is your current status in Canada?
 - Permanent Resident
 - Citizen