Parenting practices in a migration context

A qualitative interview study of five Spanish mothers living in Germany.

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Abstract

Europe is living a process of internalisation: the EU policies toward new economic agreements and visa regimes have increased transnational migrations, and have affected the way national borders are understood (Silverstein, 2005:376). Besides, social researchers have highlighted the active role of children (see e.g. Ryan et al., 2008), who seem to influence the migration process of the parents in the receiving country and make the experience of migrant parents a focus of interest.

This qualitative research focuses on parents living in Germany, exploring their talks about parenting practices in a migration context. For this, five Spanish mothers living in Berlin and Munich are interviewed, and their discourses are analysed using the thematic analysis presented by Braun & Clarke (2006). The study exposes the following themes: the perceived national differences in child rearing and family care; the cultural heritage and presence of the Spanish language and culture in the parenting practices; and the experience of care delegation in the foreign country. It also comments on the perceived influence of children in the migration process of the participants.

The study concludes on the significant presence of the origin language and culture in the parenting practices of the participants and the great influence that having children has had in their migration experience. The presence of children affects the relation to their own culture and language, their opinions towards the welfare system and culture of Germany, and their social life and further permanence in the receiving country.

Keywords: children, Germany, migration, parenting practices, Spain.


Resumen

Europa está viviendo un proceso de internacionalización: los nuevos tratados económicos y regímenes de visa han aumentado las llamadas migraciones transnacionales y han cambiado la concepción de las fronteras nacionales (Silverstein, 2005:376). Estudios sociológicos han destacado el papel activo de los niños (ver e.j. Ryan et al, 2008), quienes afectan de alguna manera el proceso de migración de sus padres en el país de acogida, y convierten la experiencia de las familias emigrantes en un foco de interés.

Este estudio cualitativo explora el caso de cinco madres españolas viviendo en Alemania, analizando cómo hablan sobre la maternidad en un país extranjero. Cinco madres españolas que viven en Berlin y Munich han sido entrevistadas y sus discursos se han analizado usando el análisis temático presentado por Braun & Clarke (2006). El estudio expone los temas siguientes: las percibidas diferencias entre las prácticas parentales de las dos nacionalidades; la herencia cultural y la presencia del idioma y cultura española; y la experiencia respecto el cuidado infantil en Alemania. Además, el estudio expone las percepciones de los participantes acerca de los cambios que tener hijos ha tenido en su proceso de migración.

El estudio concluye comentando la significante presencia del idioma y cultura de origen en las prácticas parentales de los participantes y la gran influencia de los hijos en su experiencia migratoria. Los hijos afectan la relación de los participantes con su propia cultura y lenguaje, sus percepciones de la cultura y el país de migración, y su vida social y decisión de permanencia en el país extranjero.

Palabras clave: Alemania, España, familia, hijos, migración.
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1. Introduction

The parameters of migration are changing in the current times, where a highly mobile population is taking advantage of the free market and border mobility within Europe (Ramasawmy, 2013:13). The new technologies and faster travel nets influence the way cultural assimilation is understood, creating very international cities and affecting the views of the migrants on the existence of national borders (Silverstein, 2005:376).

Since 2008 Spain has been suffering from an economic crisis, which has had significant implications for employment. The prospect of a better future together with the facilities to work abroad, the internalisation of Spanish companies and the mobility of education programs, have increased Spanish migration towards other European countries (González-Enríquez & Martínez Romera, 2017:118). The last figures by Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE) in 2018 show that almost 2.5 million of Spanish citizens are living abroad and 34% of them live in another European country (INE, 2018) (A.1, Table 1). The increasing number of Spanish migration has not been followed by an in-depth study of these cases, with very few migration studies on the integration and lives of the Spanish citizens living abroad existing. Elgorriaga, Ibabe & Armoso’s (2016) work on the psychological adjustment of Spanish citizens, Alaminos, Albert & Santacreu’s (2010) study of the status of highly skilled working migration in the European countries and González and Martínez’s (2017) comparison of Spanish migrants with Italian, Greek and Portuguese high qualified migrations are examples of some of the few recent studies on the topic.

The study presented explores the particular situation of five Spanish mothers living in Germany. The focus on the mothers’ perspectives is motivated by the fact that only mothers volunteered for the study, and even if the option to have a paired interview was proposed, all five decided to share their experiences individually.

The choice of interviewing parents is motivated by the ideas of several migration researchers (Valenzuela, 1999; Ryan et al., 2008; Scott & Cartledge, 2009 among many others), who have highlighted the particular nature of family migration. They argue the significant role of children in the integration and cultural assimilation of the family members and the different patterns experienced by migrants parents. For instance, Ryan, Sales Tilki & Siara (2008:673) argue in their study that children enable migrant women to create socialised networks in a migration context and Valenzuela (1999:724) identifies the active role that
migrant children have in the household, assisting their parents in specific activities, such as translating, teaching or caring for younger siblings. Looking at the claims of the “new” studies on childhood regarding the active social role of children (see James & Prout 1997), the possibility that children influence the migration experience of the parents becomes a focus interest.

There are several reasons for the choice of Germany as the country focused on in this study. First of all, Germany, together with France and the UK, it is one of the most common destinations for Spanish migrants within Europe and is the European country with a highest migration population rate (Eurostat, 2017) (A.1 Table 2). Secondly, my condition as a Spanish migrant in Germany for a short period has allowed me to observe the considerable number of cultural activities for children and adults that take place in Spanish; indicators of a very active migration population who are creating common spaces for themselves in German cities.

1.2 Research problem, aim and questions

As the previous research indicates, the migration patterns in the highly-mobile Europe have changed in the last years. The creation of faster networks of communication and transport together with the facility to move and work within the European Union has affected the way migration and national borders are understood, and the “new” migrants maintain a close relationship with their country of origin (see e.g. Silverstein, 2005). This makes the focus on parenthood a relevant one, in order to identify if these patterns regarding the presence of the origin culture also influence the way children are raised in a migration context. Besides, social researchers (see e.g. Valenzuela, 1999; Ryan et al., 2008) have highlighted the active role of children influencing the migration experience of their parents, which also confirms the relevance of parenthood in migration as a research field.

The thesis aims to explore how Spanish mothers living in Germany talk about parenting practices1 in a migration context. Questions asked are:

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1 In this research, the term “parenting practices” refers to all the activities and or concerns that parents raised in the interviews while talking about children.
- How do Spanish parents living in Germany talk about their parenting practices in a migration context? What are their central concerns regarding raising a child in a foreign country?

1.3 Outline

The research begins with a review of previous research with a focus on the studies on the “new migration” patterns and the particular nature of family migration. It follows the description of data collection, ethical considerations and method of analysis. The analysis comments on the themes related to the aim and the conclusions present the findings of the research.

2. Previous Research

This study focuses on migrant experiences within European borders, and therefore the contemporary studies on “new migration” patterns and the special nature of the “highly mobile” European migrants in the current free border policy are especially relevant. The concepts of “transnationalism” and “invisible” migrants are introduced together with the most relevant studies on family migration, presenting some of the current fields of research in both qualitative and quantitative sociological migration studies. The comment on previous research ends with a reflection on the relevance of the study in migration and childhood studies, explaining the gaps in knowledge and the difference in approach presented in this research project.

2.1 The ‘new’ migration studies in a “highly mobile” Europe

The new era of communication and transport connections has influenced the way migration is understood. This model of contemporary migration is described as the “new migration”; the different nature of which can be seen in the large-scale migration between developed countries, the easier low-cost transport and communication links, its temporal duration, and its less definite plans (Ramasawmy, 2013:13). Besides, the existing international laws and the creation of a quicker network connection have increased the so-called
“transnationalism”, which Vertovec (1999:447) defines as the “multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states”. Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt (1999:1486) and Kivisto (2001:549) in their studies have linked this new understanding of borders with migration studies research, arguing distinctive social norms and a different understanding of integration in the receiving country. In this vein, Schiller, Basch & Blanc (1995:48) identify the individuals who “forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origins and settlement” as “transmigrants”.

Europe is undergoing a process of internalisation caused by its geopolitical integration and by facilities regarding mobility within the free European space. The EU policies toward new economic agreements and visa regimes have increased transnational migrations, creating new terms of integration for these new “highly mobile Europeans”. As early as the 1981, French scholars (see e.g. Catani, 1986) started to formulate this “new paradigm” in European migration research, questioning whether the migratory flows were not illustrating the “end of the national” and the beginning of the “transnational” within the European continent (Silverstein, 2005:376).

Adrian Favel’s recent studies on European mobility show how the conception of national borders is changing in contemporary migrants. He presents the concept of “invisible” migrants, whose “integration” is largely irrelevant (See Favell, 2014):

They do not see themselves as “migrants” at all. […] they have no interest or compulsion to ‘integrate into Britain or (even less likely) England. What they do see themselves as integrating into is a conception of the city: into a global and off-shore European London, into which anyone and everyone can become a Londoner (Favell, 2013:56).

Favell argues that contemporary European migrants present a different understanding of national borders, as they have no intention to integrate into a different nation but into the concept of a “global city”.
The “new” migration studies, caused by the new era of communication and faster transport has influenced the way borders are understood, and the concept of “transmigrants” has been created to define the distinctive norms of integration for these new migrants. Europe presents these “new” parameters on migration research, as its geopolitical integration and mobility facilities have increased the so-called “transnational” migrations with migrants maintaining a close relationship to their origin country. This plays a significant role in this study, as previous research has identified the significant role that the migrants’ country of origin and tradition plays in the parenting practices in a migration context (see e.g. Renzaho, Dhingra, & Georgeou’s study on migrant youth in Australia, 2017).

In the following section, the nature of family migration is presented. It looks at the social researchers that have argued the active role of children in the lives of their parents and thus their influence in the migration experience.

2.2 Family migration

In the 1980’s sociologists in the UK began to take an interest in children as active members of adult socialisation activities, starting a “new” paradigm in child studies. This “new” paradigm, resumed by James & Prout (1997), had the agency of children as a central tenet. They argued that children’s social relationships and cultures are “worthy of study in their own right” and that children must be seen as “actively involved in the construction of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live” (James & Prout, 1997:4). This new approach to the agency of children and their active role in socialisation, both in their circle but also in the ones around them, is especially relevant in migration studies. Several researchers (Valenzuela, 1999; Ryan et al., 2008; Scott & Cartledge, 2009 among many others) have highlighted the particular nature of family migration, exploring the influence that children have in the family’s migration experience.

Ryan, Sales Tilki & Siara (2008:673) focus their study on the creation of social networks in the receiving country, a crucial aspect to understanding patterns of migration, settlement and employment. The presence of children seems to enable migrant women to create new localised networks, both in the school environment and in children’s activities and playgrounds (Ryan et al., 2008:685). Valenzuela (1999:724) identifies the active role that migrant children have in the household, assisting their parents in specific activities, such as...
translating, teaching or caring for younger siblings. This may help the parents integration but also slow down the process, as the parents might rely on children to communicate on their behalf (Ramasawmy, 2013:39). Another aspect that seems to facilitate integration in the host country are the mixed-nationality relationships, which create direct access to host-country sociocultural networks (see Scott & Cartledge’s study on mixed-nationality families, 2009). Furthermore, Renzaho, Dhingra & Georgeou (2017:13) analyse in their study the intergenerational acculturation gaps, identifying two critical issues: the loss of family capital and intergenerational conflicts. They argue that children might not want to interact with their family as a rejection of the ancestral traditions and that parents can experience the fear that the children will lose the ancestral culture.

Traditionally the pattern in family migration was explained through the father finding work abroad and the mother either accompanying him or joining him later. However, this pattern has been recently challenged by various studies on female migration, showing the influence that women have in labour supply (Baker, Benjamin, & Baker, 1997:445) and the weight of non-economical realms in decision-making (Smith, 2004:226). In relation to this, Wall & José (2004) highlight the differences in child-caring decisions according to the type of migration. They argue that high qualified professional migrants usually delegate childcare to paid facilities in the receiving country, whereas unskilled worker migrant families are associated with unsatisfactory child-care solutions. Worker families are under pressure to work (for low income) but also from work (less time for child-care). The particular case of “accompanying-mother” migrations is usually related to mother-centred care, which can develop into problems of isolation and difficulties of integration. Finally, individual student migration, usually followed by inter-ethnic marriage, is associated with a family division paid work (both working full time) and a balanced formal extensive delegation of care (Wall & Sao José, 2004:616-17).

Some of the latest studies on family migration and the role of children in the migration experience of their parents have been presented, focusing on the creation of socialised networks, the intergenerational conflicts and the delegation of care in the receiving country. These studies have significant relevance in the presented research, as the new accountancies created after having the first child, the experience of the care delegation in the receiving country, and the intergenerational conflicts regarding the primary language of the child were
topics raised during the interviews of the study. The following section comments on the reasons for and contribution to previous research.

2.3 Summary previous research

The following study aims to contribute to the research field with a qualitative approach. The qualitative method presents another insight to migration experiences, giving voice to individual cases in each specific context. The focus on parenthood is especially relevant because of the particular nature of familial migrants, whose migrant experience can be altered with the birth of the first child. Several qualitative studies have illustrated individual experiences of immigrant families in Europe, such as the study of young Italian middle-class families in London by Bonizzoni (2017), the lives of Polish migrants in Edinburgh by Ramasawny (2013) and the focus on parenting practices of Turkish and Vietnamese Families in Germany by Nauck, Schnoor & Lotter (2017). However, no specific qualitative study on Spanish families living in Germany has been found to date. The study contributes to previous research on the migrant experience of Spanish parents by focusing on small children in pre-school, as the older son of the interviewed mothers for the study was only five years old.

The topic presented is relevant not only because of the lack of qualitative studies on Spanish migration in Germany but also given its importance in the current times. The switch in sociological studies regarding the active role of children as social actors and the increasing importance of child studies research make the exploration of parenting practices in a migration context especially relevant. Besides, young and family migration has increased in Spain during the last years, due to the crises but also to the current internalisation that is living today’s Europe since the creation of a free border market. In this light, the presence of Spanish families in Germany and their activism and creation of new spaces and social networks to interact with each other is continually growing, which makes them a group of interest to study in the field of family migration and child studies.

This chapter has been a review of previous research in migration and childhood studies. In the following chapter, the methods used to collect and analyse the data of the present qualitative research are explained and commented.
3. Method

The study aims to give a voice to Spanish mothers living in Germany in order to explore how they reason about their parenting practices in a migration context. For this, a qualitative design in the form of semi-structured interviews was considered the most appropriate and five mothers living in two different cities in Germany were interviewed. In this chapter, the sample of the study is presented together with the interview method used to collect the final data for the research. Besides, it presents the ethical considerations and the method of analysis used in the study.

3.1 Data Collection

3.1.1 The sample

The participants were contacted through Facebook groups which work as a contact network for Spanish migrants living in Munich, Berlin, Hamburg and Köln. Even though up to eight mothers volunteered for the study, the final sample was formed by five mothers who are currently living in Germany and have one or more children. The limited time of the study was the reason for only picking five participants and those contacting earlier were the selected ones. All participants who showed interest were female, and even if the option to have a paired interview was proposed, all five decided to answer the questions individually. Considering this it is important to highlight that the sample is representative of the mothers’ experiences and perspectives, as no father volunteered for the study.

The five mothers who volunteered for the study are currently living in Munich and Berlin. The higher rate response rate was from the Berlin group, as it is, by far, the most active and numerous Facebook group. However, it was decided not to focus solely on this city as the experience of living in Berlin, a very international city, can differ significantly from other regions in Germany. In this light, it was considered that the contrast between Berlin and another German city, e.g. Munich, was needed for the study.

The mothers who participated in the study are middle class and moved to Germany for various reasons. Only one of them moved because of her husband’s work, three decided to extend their studies abroad and sought to find work in Germany knowing the difficulty of
finding a good position in Spain, and one moved after a difficult personal time in Spain. Three of the mothers arrived in Germany alone and found their partner there, while the other two moved to Germany with their Spanish husbands. It follows that the nationality of the husband varies within the sample, as three of the mothers are married to Spanish husbands, one has a German partner, and the last one is married to an Argentinian born and raised in Germany. The age of the children varies between one and five years old, and therefore the school experience has been focused on the German Kita system and the Kindergarten. Whereas most of the participants arrived in Germany more than seven years ago, there is one participant who has been living in Germany for only two years and had another experience as a migrant before that.

3.1.2 Interview method

The data for the analysis was gathered using semi-structured interviews. This was considered the most appropriate method to explore the talk of the mothers about their parenting practices, as it allowed the researcher to ask about the context of every response and opinion. There were no specific themes to be analysed but rather it was the intention to let the mothers explain their topics of concern when asked about their parenting practices and personal experiences in Germany. Therefore, the active nature of interviews, where the participant can move from one topic to another in a very flexible way, was preferred over other sources of information. The limitations of the chosen method of data collection is the small sample of the study, as it presents individual experiences and not a complete picture of parenting practices in a migration context. Besides, if instead of having semi-structured interviews the interview guide would have focus on a particular topic, e.g. socialisation of the parents in the receiving country through their children, the collection of the data on the specific theme might have been larger. However, I consider that the flexibility of the interviews, with the participants being able to develop their responses, was able to get a complete and deep data sample. The final data collection was of five interviews of approximately 30 minutes each, creating a total of 141 minutes of recorded material.

The content of the interviews was a combination of biographical accounts of the arrival and the current situation in the migrant context, and the exposition of the interviewees own perspectives on parenthood in the receiving country (see A.3 for the interview guide).
The topics raised during the interview were as follows: the reasons to move to Germany and the experience of arrival; the experience of living in two different countries; the interviewees’ connection to Spain and Spanish culture; the schooling experience; and their social life and integration in German society among others.

The interviews were semi-structured (see Bryman, 2008:470). In this manner, the ‘rambling’ or going off topic was encouraged in order to see what the interviewee considers relevant. My function as the interviewer was to initiate the conversation on a specific topic, i.e. the experience in the school system or the differences in parenting practices between Germany and Spain, and to listen to their discourse and formulate follow-up questions if these were deemed necessary to get a more in-depth response. Even if a set of questions and topics on which to comment was prepared in advance, they were not asked in a specific order, and not all of them were investigated in all interviews. In this sense, the questions were flexible, reformulated in each specific case and new questions that worked as follow-ups to the interviewees’ replies were included during the interview.

The interviews were conducted through Skype and Facebook calling platforms and were recorded using a desktop recording app. The use of an online platform allowed the study to increase the variety of the sample, avoiding a geographically limited study (Iacono, Symonds, & Brown, 2016:3). Internet eliminates the borders of time and space, so there was no need to travel to Germany or find an adequate location for the interviews. Deakin & Wakefield (2014:609) claim that online interviewing can increase participation as the participants are often grateful to tell their story online and thus avoid travelling and finding the time to conduct a face-to-face interview. In this study, the participants did appreciate the use of Skype as they mentioned having limited time and they were grateful to interview in a very flexible timeline, usually after dinner. Another advantage of online calling platforms is that they are easily recorded so that both the audible and visual interaction is saved using a recording Desktop app. Even if some rapport can be lost because of a bad connection, lack of visible body gestures or distraction caused by participants location or unexpected interruptions by other family members (see Iacono et al., 2016), online interviewing has been proved to be a useful replacement of the traditional face-to-face interviews. Besides, it can even get a more complete rapport, especially with very shy participants (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014:610).
In this research, the online platforms proved to be a useful tool. Even if some technical issues were encountered in two of the interviews where the connection was interrupted at some point, the experience can be described as very positive. It is true that the familial location caused interruptions (mainly by the children), but it also allowed some interesting additional comments to be added to the interviews, as husbands and even grandmothers added their views to some of the responses of the participants.

Even though the study and the analysis were to be done in English, the interviews were conducted in Spanish in order to create a more comfortable conversation for the interviewed participants. The transcription was done in Spanish, and only those citations needed for the analysis were translated.

This section has been a description of the process of data collection. It follows the ethical considerations regarding the information of the participants and the use of online platforms in social research.

3.2 Ethical considerations

In order to avoid Bryman’s (2016:125) possible ethical transgressions in research projects, all participants were carefully informed about the research project and about the use of the information, which would not be used in other contexts. The five participants received an information sheet concerning the research in Spanish (see A.4), were asked to fill out a short questionnaire with some necessary information and to sign a consent form (see A.5). In the consent form, it was clearly explained that the interviews were going to be recorded and transcribed, that their confidentiality was guaranteed and that their names would not appear in the final project. As a result, no participant was interviewed without an informed, freely given consent.

The platforms Skype and Facebook call were chosen to conduct the interviews. With the use of online platforms, it is especially important to remind the participants that they will be recorded in audio and image, as it may not be as transparent as when the interviews are conducted in person. The location of the interview is usually a private space, and therefore no images of their houses or personal belongings were shared with a third person. Deakin & Wakefield (2014:610) identify the verification of identity as the main ethical issue in the use
of online platforms. In this study, this was not the case as the participants were contacted through Facebook and the interviews were done after exchanging some first initial words through the message application. This is to say that I already had some information concerning the participants and access to a profile picture before the interview, which was used as a verification procedure before starting the interview.

The language used during the interviews was Spanish and I translated only the abstracts selected to exemplify the analysis. I consider the translations not to be a bias issue as the analysis was done with the original transcriptions, and not the translated transcripts. The translations were only used to present the data commented on in the written version of the analysis.

In this section, the ethical considerations for social research have been commented on in order to avoid any ethical transgressions. The following section focuses on thematic analysis, the method used to analyse the data in this research.

3.3 Method of analysis

The analysis of the data collected was conducted using the thematic analysis presented by Braun & Clarke (2006). The thematic analysis presents an inductive approach, as it worked close to the interview material with a bottom-up perspective. Later on, after the identification of the themes, it became a bit more deductive as I turned to previous research for some help in understanding the themes and stories of the participants.

The six phases methods by Braun & Clarke (2006:86-93) were used to identify the codes within the data collected and to create the final thematic map which represents the entire data. In this manner, the analysis began with the transcription of the interviews (1), which was done entirely in the Spanish language. During the transcription, I started to realise that some of the responses of the participants were directed to the same ideas, which initiated the second and third phase of Braun & Clarke: the search for the initial codes (2) and the gathering of possible themes (3).

In order to isolate potential themes during this first approach to data, Bryman’s (2016:583-589) guidelines regarding the identification of themes worked as guidelines. In this light, not only the repeated ideas were studied carefully but also the topics in which the
participants were more passionate about, analysing which aspect could have made them go back to the same idea during the interview. Some of the indicators used for the creation of the final theme list were the pauses during their discourses, and the repetition of specific words and concepts in different questions, such as the presence of the grandparents figure in varied contexts. In this sense, the questions were not necessarily linked to specific themes, as the participants’ discourse moved from one topic to another and introduced more than one theme when asked about a particular subject.

The topics identified as possible themes for the analysis were gathered to form a thematic map, initiating the fourth phase of the analysis (4). The themes that appeared in the thematic map were as follows: the perceived national differences on parenting practices and family care; the presence of the Spanish language and culture in the parenting practices; the delegation of care; and the perceived influence of children in the migration context. Some of the themes included sub-headings, regarding the differences on the subject within the two nationalities but also specifying the various concepts concerning the same theme. Each theme was named and defined, completing the fifth phase of Braun & Clarke’s thematic analysis (5).

The last phase of the analysis was to choose the examples in the data and organise them in comparison to the literature (6). The chosen abstracts were selected by looking for the text that was transmitting the idea of the theme more clearly. There was the intention not to only represent one or two voices but be able to exemplify the variety of the data collected. I translated the abstracts selected as examples for each theme and changed the names of the participants to pseudonyms.

This chapter has commented on the methods used in the research to collect and analyse the data and the ethical considerations. The following chapter presents the analysis of the collected data.

4. Analysis

This chapter illustrates the main concerns of the mothers in the study regarding their parenting practices in a migration context. The topics discussed are as follows: the perceived national differences in child rearing and family life; the cultural heritage and presence of the Spanish language and culture in the parenting practices; the delegation of care and favourable
balance between work and family life; and the perceived influence of children in the migration process.

The study uses the term “culture” during the analysis of the participants’ talks. The term “culture” is a broad term, and it is much contested (Montgomery, 2013:163). The intention of the research is not to define culture but rather use the term when the participants talked about “two different cultures” concerning the parenting practices in Germany and Spain.

4.1 Perceived national differences in child rearing and family care

Parenting practices are closely related to cultural behaviours and traditions, and the treatment and education of children can largely change from one country to another. The five mothers interviewed exposed some of the perceived parenting practices in Germany that had surprised them and compared them to what they practice and know from their tradition.

4.1.1 Perceived Spanish cultural traits in child rearing: the strong family bonds

The most relevant aspect found in the participant’s discourses regarding their own parenting practices is the strong family bonds of the Spanish culture. The role of the extended family was especially relevant, exemplified by the importance of the figure of the grandparents in the upbringing of the children. Grandparents were mentioned during the interviews in various contexts and seemed to have strong ties with the children even if they do not live in the same country. It is also relevant to highlight that in two of the interviews the grandparents were present, as they were visiting at the time.

The participants linked their regular visits to Spain with their family members, especially the grandparents. When asked about how often they go back to Spain, Carmen2 (interview 3) said she tries to go four times a year, but she often has the grandparents at home, as they have more flexibility to travel. Ester (interview 5) explained that before having the children they were going back to Spain one or twice a year, but since they were born, they try to go three or four times a year and, she added with a laugh, “if not the grandparents would

2 The names of the participants were changed to pseudonyms.
die”. In this sense, for the participants, the fact that the extended family lives in Spain is a reason to increase the visits now that children are involved.

The presence of children and the location of the extended family also affects the views of the mothers’ regarding the staying in or leaving of the receiving country. For Carmen (interview 3), the family is a central issue, as she wants her child to be close to her family members. Dolores (interview 4) is an example of a different situation as, even if she came alone, her sister and her mother followed her, and now they live in Berlin as well. She was the only participant who had family nearby, and she considered it “big luck”. When asked about going back to Spain, Dolores (interview 4) argued that she would gladly go back to Spain, even more after the long winter she just went through, but she also has to consider what is best for her child. This is to say that right now almost all her child’s extended family, aside from her maternal grandfather, live in Germany and it would not be good for the child to go back to Spain and be apart from all of them. In this manner, thus having the extended family living in Spain is a pressing reason to return once there are children involved, whereas having family members in Germany a reason to stay even if the Spanish climate or food is missed.

It is clear that for the five mothers of the study the role of the family is a central one, and now that they have children the location of their extended family has a direct influence in their migration experience. The role of the family unit in the Spanish culture gains importance when compared to the German behaviour, and some of the participants explained they were surprised by the small role that the family plays in the German society. For instance, Ester (interview 5) explained that one of the things that surprised her most when she moved to Germany was the fact that the family relations are only meaningful when the children are very young. She argued that when the child is eighteen years old the contact is lost and “they only see them for family meetings once a year, even when they live in the same city”. Del Valle, Canali, Bravo, & Vecchiato’s (2013:236) in their study about child protection in Italy and Spain have argued that the strong family bonds in the Mediterranean culture can be seen not only in the way children are raised but also in their behaviour, e.g. the fact that young people become independent of their families later than in other countries. In this sense, the mothers of the study were surprised that young people in Germany show such an independent behaviour and do not maintain the bond with their family members. as they are used to a very different situation in their origin country.
4.1.2 Perceived German cultural traits in child rearing: The achievement of self-sufficiency

The participants identified a certain higher level of independence in the German children, as they considered they are raised towards the achievement of “self-sufficiency”.

Alicia (interview 1) considers that German parents are not as protective, they leave the children to play alone in the park with the idea that “if they fall, they learn”. She also sees differences between her children and the others children in the Kita, who already dress themselves alone when her children still cannot, and who are more quiet and peaceful in public spaces such as restaurants. This different behaviour of German children was also mentioned by Carmen (interview 3), who was surprised by how quiet the German children are in comparison to her own and the children of her Spanish friends.

Another recurring theme that the interviewed mothers highlighted was the liberty that children have in choosing their clothes. Ester (interview 5) was surprised with the combinations that children wear, colours and patterns that do not go together and the use of socks with sandals. Dolores (interview 4) explains that these differences are because children have the liberty to choose their clothes even when they are only four. In the following excerpt, Dolores (interview 4) exposes some perceived cultural differences regarding parenting practices:

Example 1: Interview 4, Dolores and Clara (interviewer)

Clara: Do you think you can identify some differences between raising a child in Spain and Germany? Things that have grabbed your attention.

Dolores: Well let’s see. The way children are dressed and so it’s very different. Not only because they wear more winter clothes but also because they have much liberty to dress themselves. In fact, when they reach an age, four years old, in a way they can choose their own clothes. […] And also they learn how to dress and eat alone earlier, they are always
looking for the independence... that the children are independent from a very early age. Sometimes my mum says: “wait, there will be a moment they will learn to do it by themselves”. But here you have the feeling they want them to go alone to school when they are only six years old, and that happens here, they are very independent. There is more protection in Spain, from what I have seen.

In this excerpt, Dolores (interview 4) presents her perspectives on the parenting practices she has identified in Germany. Her Spanish background makes her focus on the aspects that differ from what she has seen and experienced in her country of origin. In this sense, she was surprised by the way children are dressed, as they have the liberty to choose their own clothes. Children are given the liberty to choose their clothes and to play and learn in a less protective environment, as German parents are looking for their children to become independent at a very early age.

Dolores’ (interview 4) excerpt is an example of the German parenting practices that surprised the Spanish mothers for being different to her own. The identified parenting practices are based on feelings of independence and liberty, as present a lower level of parental protection.

4.1.3 Final thoughts and summary of perceived differences in child rearing

Parenting practices are strongly bond to the cultural traits of each society. Several social researchers have argued that the differences between children are not only biological but also cultural, as the way children experience childhood is strongly related to how are they treated by adults (see Montgomery, 2013:183). In this research, the difference between a more nuclear family system in Germany and its culture of self-sufficiency has been a clash to the participants own tradition, based on the strong family bonds in Mediterranean culture. In this sense, the participants did not only comment on “strange” parenting practices but also on the differences between their children and the German ones, identifying a different behaviour.
This section has commented on the perceived national differences regarding child rearing and family life. The next theme introduces the concept of cultural heritage, presenting the participant’s views on the role of the Spanish language and culture in the upbringing of their children.

4.2 Cultural heritage: the presence of the Spanish language and culture in the parenting practices

The participants of the study commented on the high presence of the Spanish language and culture in their family life. The Spanish language is not only spoken at home since, in order to increase the presence of the Spanish culture in the upbringing of their children, the mothers are actively looking for activities in Spanish and other children of Spanish origin for their own to play with.

4.2.1 The role of the Spanish language in the upbringing of the children

Several participants commented on the significant influence that the Kita (daycare centre) has on their children, as they hear German all day and Spanish does not have the same presence in their everyday life. The case of the mixed families presents an even more extreme scenario, as the child only hears Spanish being spoken by one of the parents. In order to balance this situation, some mothers started looking for activities in Spanish for their children.

The case of Blanca (interview 2) is especially relevant. She is a yoga teacher for children in Spanish, as after having her first child, she saw that as a mother she needed more Spanish activities for her child. Another participant, Dolores (interview 4), is planning to sign her child up for a music class in Spanish and she is very aware of the many choices she has, as she explained that several activities had been created in the city of Berlin so that Spanish-speaking children can interact with each other and in so doing not lose their native language. The following excerpt by Blanca (interview 2) presents the presence of the Spanish language in the upbringing of her child:

Example 2: Interview 2, Blanca

Blanca: Well when I was thinking about what to do with my life, and having a little girl, I started to see how life
here with kids would be. I realised there are many possibilities of activities for children. So I decided to teach yoga. So now I teach yoga classes for children in Spanish. […] Some people said, “are you crazy? How are you going to have a Spanish yoga group for children? It is so specific.” But there is an audience. Because as a mother I realised I needed Spanish activities for my child. Because the Kita, the day-care centre, is all in German. And it is impossible to… if in general, it is impossible to get a place, in a bilingual one, forget about it. […] So.. my child goes to a German Kita and well, she speaks German. And that makes me angry because... It is very frustrating to know that all the Spanish she is ever going to learn will only come from me. And this is a huge responsibility. And she is two and a half and she talks... well her language is German. She sometimes uses one or two words in Spanish, but it is all German.

In this excerpt, Blanca (interview 2) exposes the reasons that motivated her to start a group of yoga for children in Spanish. She realised that she was not the only Spanish mother looking for Spanish activities for her child, and she even found a group with fellow mothers, Mamis en Movimiento, who organise themselves to bring Spanish children together. She could not get a place in a bilingual Kita, and now she explains with frustration that her child’s primary language is German, and not Spanish. That makes her angry, as she understands that is her responsibility to pass on her language and culture to her child. She is trying hard to introduce Spanish to her parenting practices, reading Spanish books to her child, joining music and yoga classes with other Spanish families and attending Spanish events with her.
This is to say that she is creating a Spanish language environment for her child to balance the input of the German language she gets in the Kita.

Blanca’s (interview 2) excerpt exemplifies the vital role of the Spanish language in the parenting practices of the participants. It does not only present the disposition of the mothers for their children to inherit the Spanish language but also the fear that the German influence will make them lose their Spanish identity, as in the mixed-families the primary language of the children at the moment is German.

4.2.2 The role of the Spanish culture in the upbringing of the children

The children’s language ability is not the only concern of the mothers of the study regarding their Spanish origin. The participants consider essential that their children interact with other Spanish children and not only with their German companions in the Kita, and that they do not lose the Spanish traditions such as the food culture.

Ester (interview 5) explained she tries to mix with other Spanish families, so their children do not think they are “weird” for speaking Spanish. Blanca (interview 2) commented that she has connections with other families and specific groups of Spanish families such as Mamis in Movimiento and Grupo Solete so that her child “can connect with other children that also speak it”. Dolores (interview 4) considers that to mix with other Spanish-speaking families is not only a matter of language ability but also a way to transmit cultural behaviours because in her words, “at the end we have the language affinity but also a way of thinking”. She wants her child to inherit not only the Spanish language but also these traditions. In this sense, the mothers of the study explained the necessity for their children to mix up with other Spanish children, as they want them to interact in Spanish but also inherit the “Spanish” behaviour.

Another recurring theme across the interview material was related to the Spanish food culture. In this sense, the only negative aspect that the participants commented on regarding the daycare centre was related to the food that children get. Alicia (interview 1) and Ester (interview 5) complained about the quality of the food, which for them is inadmissible. Alicia (interview 1) was surprised by the low regulation regarding the menus, as she explained that in Spain you get the information of what are they going to eat for the whole month, whereas
this is not the case in Germany. She considers that “they don’t care if they eat pasta every day, they don’t care about the value of the food”. Ester (interview 5) tried to change it and bring different food only for her children, in her words “similar but more Spanish”, but in the end, she can only control what they eat at home, as her children wanted to eat the same food their friends eat. The participants had no negative feelings towards the day-care system or the different learning practices, but the food they serve. This confirms again the strong ties of the mothers to their origin country and the significant influence that this plays on their parenting practices.

4.2.3 Final thoughts and summary of cultural heritage

The presence of Spanish culture and language has a significant role in the parenting practices and everyday lives of the participants. The “new” studies on migration introduced the concept of “transmigrants” (Schiller, Basch & Blanc 1995:48), migrants who “forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origins and settlement”. It can be said that the participants of the study are representative of this “new” migration pattern, as they all maintain a close connection to their country of origin. They not only go back to Spain regularly and follow the news and politics of the country but are also creating their spaces to express themselves in their language and culture in the receiving country. The disposition of the interviewees for their children to inherit the Spanish culture affects their parenting practices, where the acquisition of the language, traditions and behaviour is a clear objective.

It is relevant to comment that the role of the Spanish tradition and language seems to be even stronger in the mixed-families. Dolores (interview 4) and Blanca (interview 2) are highly involved in looking for Spanish activities for their children and have an extensive network of Spanish-speaking friends. They seem to be representative of Renzaho et al. (2017)’s theory on intergenerational cultural gaps in migrant families, as they both showed the fear of their children not inheriting their Spanish culture and not speaking the language as often as they would want to. This intergenerational conflict can be seen at Blanca’s (Example 2) words, who expresses anger at the fact that her child’s primary language is German and not Spanish. Dolores (interview 4) and Blanca (interview 2) are married to a non-Spanish husband, and therefore Spanish is not the only language spoken at home. In this sense, the
necessity of looking for the Spanish language and culture outside the home environment is higher for them than for the other participants. Besides, they are the two participants who live in Berlin, where the number of Spanish families and international networks and activities is much higher than in Munich.

This section has introduced the theme of cultural heritage, commenting on the relevance of the Spanish language and culture in the upbringing of the children and the participants’ fear for their children not inheriting their ancestral culture, which seems to be stronger in the mixed-nationality families. In the next section, the theme regarding the delegation of care will be introduced, presenting the mothers’ talks on the day-care centre experience.

4.3 Delegation of care: a favourable balance between work and family life.

There was a general feeling among the mothers that the child-care delegation opportunities in Germany are large and that the balance between work and family life is better than in Spain.

On a general level, the participants had a positive experience of the public German daycare system. All the children were attending a German public Kita apart from Alicia’s (interview 1) children, who had not found a place in time and are attending a Waldorf daycare centre. The participants explained that it is difficult to get a place in the Kita public system, as all of them had to wait till the one they wanted accepted them. However, they consider that the flexible timetables and low prices that are offered are very impressive. The relationship with educators and the other parents was very positive, and they do not feel different as almost all the Kitas have other international families.

The Kita’s open timetables, which allows parents to pick up the children whenever they want, was referred to as a huge convenience in combining work and child-care. Besides, the low work hours and flexibility in work allows the mothers to have more time for their children. In this sense, when asked about if they were planning to go back to Spain, Ester (interview 5) explained that even if she would love to, she does not think she would be able to spend as much time with her children in Spain, as the balance between work and family life is
much better in Germany. In this excerpt, Ester (interview 5) explains her positive experience regarding the delegation of care:

Example 3: Interview 5, Ester and Clara (interviewer)

Clara: How is the experience of raising a child in Germany?

Ester: The truth is that well, is what we always say when we are in Spain: the balance between work and family life is much better here than in Spain. So (the maternal leave) is up to twelve months. If you want to. The first eight weeks are obligatory and then you can decide to take more or not. [...] And during that time you get 65% of your salary, so you can be with your baby a lot of time during the first year of life. And then when you go back to work, you have a lot… well in our works we have complete flexibility. “Oh my girl is sick I do home office”. “Today I’ll come a little bit later because I have to bring the kids to the daycare centre”. [...] And well in that aspect we see much difference with what we hear in Spain. Long work hours, grandparents here, grandparents there, babysitter here, babysitter there… and well our older child has now five and we have never needed a babysitter.

In this excerpt, we learn the extended maternity and paternal leave that was offered to Ester (interview 5) and her husband. The extended maternity and paternal leave, combined with their flexibility in work, make the balance between work and family life very easy, and they confess they have never needed a babysitter. They are very conscious of this privilege, as
when they consider their friends in Spain, they see that the work hours there are longer and the role of babysitters and grandparents is indispensable.

Elena’s (interview 5) excerpt is a clear example of the positive experience of the child-care delegation that the mothers of the study have experienced. On this subject, there is a general feeling that it is easier to balance work and family life in Germany, as the working hours are fewer and more flexible, the maternal and paternal leave is more extended, and the public care system is very affordable and with flexible timetables. The German welfare system is preferred to the Spanish one, where work hours are much longer and the figure of the grandparents and the babysitters is indispensable for working families.

4.2.3 Final thoughts and summary of child-care delegation

The experience of child-care delegation in the receiving was refereed as very positive. The welfare system in Germany is considered affordable and flexible, and it allows the mothers to expend more time with their children as if they were living in Spain.

Wall & José (2004) highlight the differences in child-caring decisions according to the type of migration. They argue that high qualified professional migrants and individual student migration usually delegate childcare to paid facilities in the receiving country and present a balanced delegation of care between the parents. Whereas the particular case of “accompanying-mother” migrations is usually related to mother-centred care, which can develop into problems of isolation and difficulties of integration. In this research, even if the reasons to migrate were different in each case, as the participants moved to Germany because of husband’s work, study or looking for better job opportunities, all five participants had a very similar and positive experience regarding the child-care facilities of the country they migrated to. In this sense, the mother-centred care and problems of isolation and difficulties of integration of the “accompanying-mother” were not identified. For instance, the only “accompanying-mother” of the sample, Alicia (interview 1), has several acquaintances with the other parents of the day-care centre and she is starting to learn German in order to be able to communicate with them.

In this section, the theme of the delegation of care has been presented. The next section comments on the perceived influence that having children has had in the migration experience of the participants.
4.4 The perceived influence of children in the migration experience

This section presents the mothers’ perspectives regarding the influence that having a child has had on their migration experience in the receiving country. It illustrates the active role of children as social agents, creating new networks for their parents to interact; and their influence on the decision of staying in or leaving of the receiving country.

4.4.1 The influence of children in the socialisation process

The participants talked about their social life, explaining their friendships and the changes that first having a child, and now entering the schooling system, has had in their social networks. The mothers argued that the presence of children allowed them to get some new acquaintances, both within the Spanish-speaking community and with German families.

4.4.1.1 Creation of socialised networks within the German society

Two mothers of the non-mixed families, Alicia (interview 1) and Ester (interview 5), mentioned in their interviews that the presence of children has allowed them to get to know other families within the German society.

Alicia (interview 1) arrived in Germany two years ago, and through her children’s friends in the Kita, she has met some of the mothers who bring the children there. She explained that “sometimes the families come at home so the children can play together and we have a very good relationship”. She is very close to an Austrian mother and now she is starting to learn German in order to be able to talk more with them, as one of the mothers does not speak English very fluently.

Ester (interview 5) was very curious to see German houses and get to know German parents through her children. She confessed she was waiting for her child to be older, so she would be invited to their houses and doing so, she would have the opportunity to get to know the German families better. However, now that she has been invited to some houses, she explained that her relationship with the German parents is still very formal and they “only talk because the kids are playing”. She is more close to a Romanian family, who also have the children in the same Kita.
4.4.1.2 Creation of socialised networks within the Spanish-speaking community

The two mothers of the mixed-families, Blanca (interview 2) and Dolores (interview 5), are examples of the creation of localised social networks within the Spanish-speaking community.

Blanca (interview 2) changed her life entirely after having her first baby, as we can see in the excerpt commented above (Example 2). She saw there were not enough activities in Spanish for her child and started a new project: yoga classes for children in Spanish. This involvement has allowed her to create an extensive network with other Spanish parents, and she is an active member of several groups of mothers, e.g. *Mamis en Movimiento*, who exchange tips and organise activities in Spanish for their children. She feels she has created a family in Berlin within the Spanish community who, in her words, “even if we live in different neighbourhoods we support each other”.

Dolores (interview 4) had a similar experience after the birth of her child. She already had some Spanish-speaking friends but, as we can see in the following excerpt, her social network within the Spanish-speaking community was largely increased after the birth of her child:

Example 4: Interview 4, Dolores

Dolores: I always try to spend my time with Spanish-speaking people, for her (the child) but also for me, of course. It’s a way to escape, for you to interact… we always try to meet with people who speak Spanish.

Clara: Did you know them before having her? Or after?

Dolores: Well, some of them before, and others because of her. Because with social networks… here it is very typical, also different from Spain, well maybe now it is starting as well, is the second-hand exchange, the second-hand clothes. Through buying second-hand clothes, I met an Argentinian woman.

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She lives very nearby, and since A. is one year old, we have been very good friends. And then there is this other mother that I met because she got pregnant at the same time as me, and we had the children at the same time, and she is Spanish-speaking too. [...] and for example this friend of mine, the Argentinian, she brings her child to a Spanish-speaking Kita, and then she knows more Spanish mothers, and through her, I have met them.

In this excerpt, Dolores (interview 4) explains how having a child has changed her social circles, as she has started to spend more time within a Spanish-speaking community for herself but also for the child. She also mentions she started a friendship when she was pregnant as the other mother was pregnant too. This affinity of being in the same situation brought the two mothers together, and they have been friends since then. The exchange of second-hand clothes for children was another starting point for a new friendship, which was continued as the two families live nearby and it is easy for the children to meet and play together. This friendship has allowed Dolores to enter a group of Spanish-speaking mothers, as her friend brings her child to a bilingual Kita and has a large group of Spanish-speaking friends.

The excerpt by Dolores (interview 4) is an example of the influence of children in the socialisation of their parents within the Spanish-speaking community. In order to increase the Spanish language and culture in the upbringing of the children, the mothers have increased their involvement within the Spanish-speaking community in Germany.

4.4.1.3 Final thoughts and summary of children’s influence in social networks

The presence of children affects the socialisation process of the mothers in the receiving country, as they explained that their circles of acquaintances have increased since the birth of their children.
For the non-mixed families, it has been a way to connect on a different level to the German society. The mothers did not know any German family before and now, thanks to attending the day-care centre, they had the opportunity to meet some of them. These new acquaintances are strongly linked to the friendships of their children, as they have visited the houses of some of the companions of class so the children can play together. In this sense, it can be said that the presence of children has allowed the mothers of the non-mixed families to enter the private sphere of native Germans.

The experience of the mixed-families is a very different one, as they already had accountancies within the German society as their partners are native German. In this case, the presence of children has not been a window to the German society but the contrary, as they have increased their friendships within the Spanish-speaking community. For them to have a child has been a connection to their ancestral culture, and the necessity to transmit their language and culture to the child has resulted in the creation of a largest Spanish-speaking social network.

Ryan, Sales Tilki & Siara (2008:685) expose in their study on localised networks that the presence of children enables migrate women to create new social networks. This seems to be the case as well in the participants of this particular study as, even if they all had friends before having children, their circle of friendships has been increased, and new social networks have been created after the birth of their first child. The ‘new’ sociological studies (see James & Prout, 1997) on childhood claim that children are active social actors who do not only shape their social network but also the networks of the ones around them. This is the case in this study, as the children shaped new socialised networks of a very different nature. Some of the examples given above occurred through the children’s friendships in the Kita, thus allowing new networks between parents; and through attending Spanish-speaking activities organised for the children in order for them to speak Spanish somewhere other than at home. The presence of children allows their mothers to increase their circle of friendships, creating not only a circle of Spanish-speaking friends but also allowing them to interact with German parents.

This section has presented the theme of the creation of socialised networks through the children. It has commented on the difference between the non-mixed families and the mixed-families, as the children’ influence on their social life has been of entirely different nature.
The following section focuses on the influence of children in the further permanence in the receiving country.

4.4.2 The influence of children on the decision to stay or leave

According to the mothers, the presence of children affects the decision regarding their further permanence in the receiving country. This confirms, once again, that children have a central role in the migration experiences of the parents.

When asked about going back to Spain and finishing her migration experience, Ester (interview 5) argued that she is not planning to go to Spain at any time soon, as she is sure she will not be able to spend the same amount of time with her children as she does in Germany. She considers that Spain does not offer a healthy balance between work and family life, as the work hours are longer and she considers that there is less flexibility in the work schedules. In the above commented excerpt regarding the balance between work and family life (Example 3), she presents her views on the Spanish system, and explains that she sees much difference between what she is experiencing in Germany and what she sees in her friends back in Spain, where the role of grandparents and babysitters is indispensable. In this sense, even if she would like to go back to Spain, she will wait till the children are older.

Dolores (interview 4) is experiencing a similar situation. She would gladly go back to Spain, but she also has to consider what is best for her child. As almost all her extended family lives in Berlin (see Perceived Spanish parenting practices section), to go back and be apart from all of them is not an option for her. The family is also a central issue for Carmen (interview 3), who considers that her child should be close to the extended family. In the following excerpt we can see the effect that having her first child has had in Carmen’s (interview 3) perspectives regarding staying in or leaving of Germany:

Example 5: Interview 3, Carmen and Clara (interviewer)

Clara:  Do you plan to stay in Munich?
Carmen:  Well I don’t know if we will stay, well now yes. I don’t know... The truth is that before having children I did not think about it, but now yes, it’s
different. I mean I’m trying to look for a job in Spain but it is not that easy. […] So now we want to go back to Spain because... (bad connection).

Clara: Sorry, I couldn’t listen to the last part. Were you saying that you are planning to go back to Spain?

Carmen: Yes, because with the kids, the family and the grandparents gain more importance. But it is complicated… As in we can’t go without thinking. We have to look for a job first.

In this excerpt, Carmen (interview 3) explains that she did not think about going back to Spain before having her first child, but that now is all different. She is very conscious of the difficulty of finding work in Spain, but she would like to go back and be closer to her extended family, especially to the grandparents. Even if before living so far away from her family and friends was not seen as a big handicap, now with the presence of children it has gained relevance and the idea of coming back, even if it is a difficult procedure, is starting to grow.

The excerpt of Carmen (interview 3) is an example of the influence of children in the migration experience regarding the staying in or leaving of the receiving country. The presence of children affects the migration experience of their parents who now have to include “what is best for their child” in the decision of further permanence in Germany.

4.4.2.1 Final thoughts and summary of children’s influence on the decision to stay or leave

The presence of children has changed the migration experience of the mothers in the study, as to have a child implies to consider what is the best option not only for themselves but also for their family. The strong family bonds of the participants and their perspectives to the welfare system of the two countries influence their migrant experience, as they want their child to be close to the extended family but also achieve a good balance between work and family life in order to spend more time with them.
Ramasawny (2013:296) in her study on Polish families in Edinburgh claims that one of the main reason for the polish migrants to stay in the UK is the idea of a ‘better future for my children’ and the seeming impossibility of re-integrating the children in the school system of the origin country. This factor was not mentioned by any of the interviewees who participated in this research, seeming to not heavily influence them. For the participants, the main reasons for staying in or leaving of the receiving country were related to the location of the extended family and the welfare system of the country and consequent delegation of child-care.

This section has focused on analysing the perceived influence of children on the decision of regarding staying in or leaving of Germany. The following chapter presents a summary of the conclusions of the research, answering the presented research question.

5. Conclusions

This research aimed to explore how Spanish parents living in Germany talk about their parenting practices in a migration context.

The topics that appeared in the participants’ talks regarding their parenting practices in a migration context were as follows: the perceived national differences in child rearing and family life; the cultural heritage and presence of the Spanish language and culture in the parenting practices; the positive experience of care delegation in Germany; and the perceived influence of children in the migration experience.

The perceived national differences regarding child rearing are linked to strong cultural traits of the Spanish and German culture. In this light, the interviewed mothers commented on some practices in Germany that had surprised them, which are directed towards the acquisition of self-sufficiency at an early age. This intention of the parents to raise independent beings contrasts with the identified stronger family bonds in the parenting practices of the participants. This is to say that the participants maintain the central role of the family of the Mediterranean culture in their parenting practices in the receiving country.

The Spanish language and culture have a significant presence in the migration experience of the participants. It affects both their parenting practices, where the acquisition of the Spanish language and culture by their children is a clear objective, and their social
relationships, as all of them have a group of closer Spanish and/or Spanish-speaking friends. The case of mixed-families is especially relevant, as the mothers showed some fear for the children losing their ancestral culture. This is to say that there is an existing intergenerational gap between them and their children, whose primary language is German and not Spanish.

The delegation of care in Germany was referred as a very positive experience. In the participants reasoning, there is a general feeling that there is a better balance between work and family life in Germany, as the working hours are less and more flexible, the maternal and paternal leave is more extended, and the public day-care system is very affordable with flexible timetables.

Finally, the perceived influence of children in the migration process of their parents was explored through the discussion of the creation of new localised networks through the children and their influence on the decision of stay or leave. The presence of children has affected the socialisation of the participants, with different results for the mixed and non-mixed families. In this light, it has allowed the mothers of the non-mixed families to enter private-spheres of German families thanks to the accountancies with the families in the day-care centre; and for the mixed-families it has increased their involvement within the Spanish-speaking community, in order to increase the presence of the Spanish language and culture in the upbringing of their children. The presence of the children also affects the mothers’ perspectives on their migration experience, as now they have to consider “what is best for the child”. In this sense, the location of the extended family and the mentioned positive experience in care delegation becomes a reason to stay in or leave of the receiving country.

At the time of this study, the children of the participants were still at a very young age, with the oldest only being five years old. Seeing the active role that children have in the migration experience of their parents, it would be interesting to see the effect that children have at an older age. Besides, the perspectives’ of the fathers were not included, as no father volunteered for the study. Further research on their talks regarding the parenting practices in the receiving country and the personal migration experiences could give a different insight to the topic.

To summarise, it can be said that the study has confirmed the particular experiences of the “new” transmigrants within Europe migration (see e.g. Schiller, Basch & Blanc, 1995), as it has shown the great presence that the origin culture has in the parenting practices of the
participants. It has shown the complexity of orienting two perceived different cultures in the upbringing of the child, where the strong sense of wanting to get to know the new country is interwoven with the strong sense of wanting to maintain the ties to ones country of origin. It has also confirmed the particular situation of the mixed-families in a migration context, who experience different patterns of behaviour and parenting practices (see e.g. Scott & Cartledge’s study on mixed-nationality families, 2009). In this study, the mixed-families are representative of Renzaho, Dhingra & Georgeou’s study on intergenerational acculturation gaps (2017), as they present a stronger link to the Spanish language and culture and the fear that their children will not inherit the ancestral culture.

The presented research has proved the significant influence that children have in the migration experience of the parents, confirming the sociological studies on the active role that children have in shaping their lives and the ones around them (see e.g. James & Prout, 1997). Children seem to raise the importance of the Spanish language and culture in the everyday life of the participants, as they want their children to inherit the language but also the “Spanish” behaviours; and affect the perception of the participants of the receiving country, identifying different parenting practices within the German society and commenting on a better welfare system regarding the delegation of care. The study has also commented on the children’ influence in the socialisation process of the parents, affecting both their involvement within the German society and the Spanish-speaking community, and on the decision regarding staying in or living of the receiving country.
List of references


Appendixes

1. Table 1
Spanish citizens living abroad (2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ambos sexos</th>
<th>Total grupos de edad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. TOTAL PAÍSES (TODOS LOS CONTINENTES)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.482.808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. TOTAL EUROPA</td>
<td></td>
<td>862.286</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notas:

Fuente:
Instituto Nacional de Estadística

2. Table 2
Number of Spanish citizens and destination country (2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ambos sexos</th>
<th>Total grupos de edad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. TOTAL EUROPA</td>
<td>862.286</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALEMANIA</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUSTRIA</td>
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<tr>
<td>BÉLGICA</td>
<td>63.571</td>
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<tr>
<td>DINAMARCA</td>
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<tr>
<td>FRANCIA</td>
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<tr>
<td>GRECIA</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRLANDA</td>
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<tr>
<td>ITALIA</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAÍSES BAJOS</td>
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<td>PORTUGAL</td>
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<tr>
<td>REINO UNIDO</td>
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<tr>
<td>SUECIA</td>
<td>9.683</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notas:

Fuente:
Instituto Nacional de Estadística
3. Interview guide

BEGINNING

- Thank you for participating in the study....

First of all, you decided to take part of a study of Spanish families in Germany. Could you briefly explain what brought you to this country and how long have you been living here?

Topic 1 MIGRATION

- What were the main reasons to move to Germany? Did you choose this country for a specific reason?
- Did you know the language and country before coming here?
- Can you explain how were your first months/year in Germany? How would you describe your first impressions?
- How old were your children when you arrived to Germany? How was their adaptation process?
- Do you think your situation right now differs largely from these first months?
- How would you describe the experience of living in two different countries?
- How often do you return to Spain?
- Do you have any other family members living close by?
- Do you plan to stay in Germany?

Topic 2 CHILDREN

- What type of school do your children attend? How would you describe the experience from your perspective?
- Are you engaged in the school activities of your children?
- What has been so far the relationship between their companions and teachers?
- Are your children engaged in any non curricular activity?
- What is the presence of Spanish (language) in the school curricula? And outside/home? (activities, language course, films, books...)
- Do you have contact with other Spanish families?

END

- Is there any other relevant aspect or experience you would like to highlight before we finish?
Familias españolas en Alemania — Clara Jubete, primavera 2018

Gracias por acceder a participar en el estudio de investigación de mi tesis de máster en Child Studies en Linköping Universitet, Suecia.

El estudio se propone dar voz a familias españolas viviendo en Alemania pues, aún ser un grupo de inmigrantes con cada vez más presencia en territorio alemán, no han tenido visibilidad en estudios migratorios. El fenómeno de la migración moderna europea, que ha aumentado desde la reciente crisis de 2008, ha llevado muchas familias a dejar su lugar de origen y trasladarse en un territorio con lengua y cultura distintas.

He decidido basar mi estudio en el particular caso de Alemania pues he vivido ahí y he podido observar la creación de Kita bilingües, actividades en español para niños y espacios de compra para productos en español, como es el caso de la librería El Mundo Azul en Berlín. El creciente número de actividades para familias españolas se combina con una frenética actividad en las redes sociales, donde existen grupos de españoles en prácticamente todas las regiones e incluso especializados en temática infantil para ayudar a resolver dudas y ayudarse mutuamente.

El estudio se realizará a través de una serie de entrevistas a un total de cinco familias que están viviendo actualmente en Alemania. La familia podrá decidir si quiere realizar la entrevista de manera individual o en pareja (por favor indicar en el formulario). La entrevista tendrá lugar entre la primera y segunda semana de Abril (fechas a concretar con cada entrevistado/a) a través de Skype. Para ello, deberán llenar el formulario que aparece al final de la descripción y firmar la hoja de consentimiento.

El contenido de las entrevistas se basará en dos temas: migración y familia. Así, las primeras preguntas serán sobre vuestra llegada a la ciudad alemana, periodo de adaptación y vuestra situación actual; y seguidamente se hablará de la experiencia de vuestro/a hijo/a en la escuela y otros ámbitos, vuestro/a relación con profesores y otras familias y la presencia de la lengua y/o cultura española en el día a día.

FORMULARIO (a llenar)

Nombre y apellido del entrevistado/a: (indicar si se hará individualmente o en pareja)

Lugar de nacimiento:

Lugar de residencia:

Años vividos en Alemania:

Número de hijos y edad:
5. Consent form (English and Spanish)

Consent Form

Spanish Families living in Germany: Clara Jubete, spring 2018

Thank you for volunteering to take part in this master thesis research project. With your permission, I would like to record and transcript the Skype interviews in order to use them as material for my analysis. I will replace your name with a pseudonym and any personal information that could clearly reveal your identity will be omitted.

Please feel free to say if you don't want to be recorded or if you would prefer not to answer a particular question or stop the interview. If you have any question before, during or after the interview, please feel free to ask.

Interviewee Consent

I agree to Clara Jubete Baseiria using the recordings and transcription of my Skype interview in her analysis for her research as part of her Masters in Child Studies in Linköping Universitet, Sweden.

Name __________________________  
Email address ____________________

Signature of Interviewee __________________________  Date __________________________
Hoja de consentimiento

Familias españolas viviendo en Alemania: Clara Jubete, primavera 2018

Gracias por participar en esta investigación de tesis de máster de manera voluntaria. Con vuestro permiso, las entrevistas por Skype serán grabadas y transcritas para ser usadas en mi análisis. Vuestros nombres serán sustituidos por seudónimos y detalles personales que puedan revelar vuestra identidad fácilmente serán omitidos.

Estás en vuestro derecho de no contestar alguna pregunta o parar la entrevista en cualquier momento. Si tenéis alguna duda antes, durante o después de la entrevista no dudéis en preguntar.

Consentimiento del entrevistado

Acepto que Clara Jubete Baseiría utilice la grabación y transcripción de mi entrevista por Skype para su análisis en su proyecto de investigación de su máster en Child Studies de Linköping Universitet, Suecia.

Nombre y apellidos _____________________________

Dirección de e-mail _____________________________

_____________________________ _______________________

Signatura del entrevistado Fecha