The Promise of Iceland

An ethnography of happiness among transnational parents

Stéphanie Barillé

Thesis for the degree of PhD
in Anthropology

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Ágrip

Á meðan fjárhagur margra heimila treystir á getu fjölskyldumeðlima til að elta störf til annarra landa, þurfa margar farandfjölskyldur að takast á við flóknar breytingar og aðskilnað. Mannfræðingar hafa lítið skoðað áhrif slíkra flutninga á (ó)hamingju farandfólks. Markmið þessarar doktorsritgerðar er að varpa ljósi á tengsl fólksflutninga og líðan þverþjóðlegra foreldra og innflytjendaforeldra sem búa á Íslandi. Þessi etnógrafíska rannsókn tekur einnig til athugunar hvernig þverþjóðlegar fjölskyldur hafa skapað samsemd, hvernig þau telja sig tilheyra, og hvaða áhrif þessir þættir hafa á vellíðan bæði foreldra sem eru farandforeldrar og þverþjóðlegir foreldrar.

Með því að vefja saman frásögnum 33 þátttakenda fjalla ég um hvernig þverþjóðlegir foreldrar og farandforeldrar (innflytjenda foreldrar) segja frá þátttöku í fjölskyldulífi úr fjarlægð og hvernig tilfinningar foreldra mótast við flutningana. Byggt er á þverþjóðlegu kenningarlegu sjónarhorni og dregin eru fram ákveðin dæmi úr viðtölum við foreldra, sem eru bæði þverþjóðlegir foreldrar, sem eru ekki í sama landi og börn þeirra, og innflytjendur sem búa með börnum sínum á Íslandi. Ég beini sjónum að tilfinningum þeirra til þess að fá dýpri skilning á fjölbreytilegum og oft flóknum nútíma fjölskylduformum og foreldrahlutverkum.

Fyrri hluti ritgerðarinnar sem gerir grein fyrir niðurstöðum (kaflar 5 og 6) hefst á umræðu um áhrif og upplifun aðskilnaðar meðal þverþjóðlegra foreldra á Íslandi, með sérstaka áherslu á tilfinningar þeirra sem búa fjarri börnum sínum. Sýnt er fram á hvernig hlutverk þverþjóðlegra foreldra er samofið hinum ýmsu félagslegum kerfum umönnunar og skyldna sem hafa áhrif á sifjatengsl stórfjölskyldu og tilfinningalega upplifun þverþjóðlegra farandforeldra.

Annar hluti niðurstaðnanna (kaflar 7 – 9) gerir grein fyrir lífi farandforeldra, sem ala upp börn sín á Íslandi og taka þátt í þverþjóðlegu fjölskyldulífi. Þar er sagt frá reynslu þeirra af umönnun barna, menntun, atvinnu, uppeldisaðferðum og hugmyndum sem varpar ljósi á hvernig ákvarðanir og hugmyndir þeirra mótast af þverþjóðlegu sjónarhorni þar sem samanburður á sér sífellt stað milli viðhorfa og þess sem tíðkast í upprunalandi annars vegar og á Íslandi hins vegar.

Með því að skoða þætti sem ná lengra en að skoða hagnýtar og efnahagslegar ástæður flutninganna gerir rannsóknin tilraun til að auka skilning á hvernig gleði og sársauki einkenna upplifanir þverþjóðlegra foreldra og innflytjendaforeldra. Þetta getur hjálpað okkur að hugsa um fólksflutninga, fjölskyldur og hamingju á nýjan hátt. Í stað þess að skoða þessa þætti sem fasta stærð, hugleiðir þessi doktorsrannsókn hvernig fólksflutningar, fjölskyldur og hamingja tengist og eru breytanleg í tíma og rúmi.

Lykilorð: Fólksflutningar, þverþjóðleiki, foreldrahlutverk, líðan, hamingja, Ísland.

Abstract

Migration is an increasingly visible phenomenon and many households across the world rely on the mobility of its family members for subsistence or economic gain. While migrant families are subjected to complex changes and periods of separation, the effect of migration on their (un)happiness has not received much attention from anthropologists. The aim of this doctoral thesis is to explore the relationship between migration, emotions and happiness for transnational and migrant parents living in Iceland. This ethnographic thesis examines the forms of togetherness and belonging that transnational families in Iceland have created, and the ways in which these practices inform the happiness of transnational and migrant parents.

Drawing on the analysis of the narratives of 33 participants, I discuss how migrant and transnational parents engage in family-making practices at a distance and the ways parental emotions are constituted in migration. Building on transnational perspectives and drawing on specific examples taken from interviews conducted with transnational and migrant parents in Iceland, I suggest focusing on emotions as a basis for reasoning to understand the multiplicity and diversity of contemporary family forms and parenthood.

Chapters 5-6 of the thesis examine the affective experiences of family separation among transnational migrant parents in Iceland. It demonstrates how transnational parenthood is embedded in various moral economies of care and duties which influence the kin practices and emotions experienced by transnational parents who live away from their children. Chapters 7-9 of the thesis delve into the lives of both transnational parents and migrant parents who raise their children in Iceland and who are involved in transnational family life. It recounts their experiences of childcare, education, employment, parenting practices and ideologies and explains how the transnational perspective often results in a bifocality that necessitates a negotiation between the participants' beliefs and practices at 'home' and 'away'. By attempting to move beyond the economic logic of migration, the overall thesis attempts to understand how the experience of migration is constitutive of positive or negative emotions in the Icelandic context. While this socio-economic context is important in the constitution of migrants' happiness and emotion, the research shows that hope, as well as personal desires and expectations against the realities of life in Iceland are defining elements in the emotional outcomes of migrant and transnational parents.

Keywords: Migration, transnationalism, parenthood, happiness, Iceland

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Thank you to my partner Richard and our children, for their love during yet another adventure!

A special thought for my mother who had been looking forward to seeing this work completed.

Contents

List of Abbreviations

ICT: Information and Communication Technologies

WEIRD: Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, Democratic

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1 Introduction

*

Fluttu mig forlög
um fjöll suður,
einn, ókunnan,
alls þurfandi.
Máttat eg móður
mál um nema,
máttat eg systur
mína sjá,
þá var mér bróðir
blíður horfinn.

Destiny sent me
south of the hills,
a lonely stranger
stripped of everything.
I could not hear
my kind mother
nor see my sweet
sister's face.
My brother's love
seemed lost forever.

Jónas Hallgrímsson

*

Estranged, exposed, lost: Jónas Hallgrímsson's poem recounts the losses we endure when we leave our home and our family, but he does not tell us what he can expect to find south of the hills. Certainly, leaving is about loss, but isn't it also about hope and good fortune?

More often than not, 'immigration porn', to use Hectór's Tobar's expression (2017), was always here to remind us of the miserable lives awaiting those who crossed borders, in particular those we call "labour migrants". Amores et al. (2019) remind us that the depiction of migrants in Western media is mostly negative and often represents them as threats or victims. The life of migrants is often framed in the media in binary terms of success or failure, and the defining experience of migration measured in those terms. The 'better life' that individuals supposedly seek for when they migrate suggest improvement and contentment, and it also suggests that happiness is one of the expected outcomes of migration. Aren't people migrating to pursue happiness?

Being a migrant to Iceland myself, I am no stranger to the wonders of the country, nor am I blinded by the challenges that go together with life in Iceland. That said, seven years of encounters with other migrants did little to allow me to understand why some seemed to be enthralled by life in the country, while others seemed desperately unhappy. My subsequent involvement in a research project led me to explore these questions and examine the reasons why a significant portion of migrants in a small town of Northern Iceland declared themselves in a survey to be 'very happy'. When the project ended, I still had many unanswered questions; the topic deserved an inquiry. What was the secret to migrants' happiness in Iceland? While investigating different avenues for this research, I found myself entangled with the participants in many ways, not only because the community I was working in was small but because the migrant community was even smaller. Many of us shared common joys and pains of being a migrant in Iceland. Many of us also shared the experience of becoming and being a parent in Iceland, and we would often meet other migrants during various social events and discuss our children and our lives. These encounters have been sowing the seeds for this research. One specific encounter, which I will briefly recount here, has helped to set the research in motion.

During a workshop which is meant to increase migrant women's confidence in speaking and using Icelandic, several migrant women are seated around in a circle. We take turns to show and describe a small object which encapsulate what we miss most from our home countries. Nostalgia is palpable around the room as we recount memories of food, friends, music, and get-together -anything that we all miss dearly. It is Nadya's turn to speak. She has been living in Iceland for over twenty years and brought a photo of two young children smiling, sitting outside in a garden. These children are grown-ups now, but the photo has been taken when they were only a few years old, before Nadya moved to Iceland. She says that this is what she misses everyday of her life in Iceland: her two children. After Nadya has finished her story,

there is silence around the room -then tears, as many of us are moved by her words. I suppose that everyone is feeling a bit silly for missing things that now appear a bit trivial compared with Nadya's ordeal.

This story stayed with me a long time, and in many ways, it has urged me to work on the theme of parental separation. Since then, I have also come to realise that our 'trivial' nostalgia is not any less real than Nadya's pain. Including the daily challenges of migrant parents who live with their children in Iceland shows that we all must navigate various difficulties. Some migrant and transnational parents who were in difficult situations or who had endured extreme hardship and loss still managed to live lives full of great pleasure and joy. How did migrant parents reconcile the challenges of being migrants in Iceland with living a meaningful and happy life? This thesis aims to complement the survey-based research that found out that a majority of migrants in Northern Iceland declared themselves to be very happy (Ólafsson & Meckl, 2013). By investigating the ways in which transnational and migrant parents negotiate migration to Iceland, life choices and separation from their children, the research will contribute to a greater understanding of the role of emotions in migration, and the context and the reasons that facilitate migrants' happiness and prosperity. Ethnographic research has much to offer to understand why some migrants manage to be happy, and why others are not. Discussions on happiness and migration often provide little depth to understand the intricacies of migrants' aspirations and desires. The disciplines' emphasis on fieldwork can help us make better sense of survey responses and understand the complexities hidden behind migrants' (un)happiness and emotions. The 'better life' apparently sought by migrants and frequently given as a reason for migration is rarely well defined in academic scholarship, and the intricacies it conceals are rarely acknowledged. Researching happiness in migration is important because it has both the potential to consider migration beyond a purely economic project, and to acknowledge happiness as a state of being irreducible to a measurable evaluation. Much scholarship on happiness has attempted to quantify happiness (Thin, 2012), and while indexes and quantitative studies can illuminate certain aspects of happiness, ethnography offers to unravel what happiness, its meanings, and its processes, can bring to everyday lives.

At the heart of this project lies the desire to understand how an ethnography paying attention to the affective dimension of parental migration may contribute to understandings of emotions and happiness for transnational migrants living at 65 degrees north. The research investigates how the happiness of transnational parents living in Iceland coexists with the absence of their children. The relevance of emotions and happiness in the knowledge on mobility is apparent in recent scholarship. Research on mobility and its impact has become a global concern, while at the same time understanding what makes people lead a happy and meaningful life has developed into an important issue in many disciplines such as development studies (Boniwell, 2017) and anthropology (Thin, 2008). Benefiting from the intersection of two

strands in academic literature, namely migration studies and happiness studies, the project attempts to recognise how migration and the everyday concerns of transnational and migrant parents living in the Northern Iceland impact emotions as well as personal and family happiness. By exploring the experiences of transnational parents and migrant parents living with their children in Northern Iceland, the main objective is to foreground the ways through which family relations shape and influence the relationship between migration, emotions and happiness. The project pays particular attention to transnational parents, i.e migrant parents who have been separated from their children for extended periods of time. The project also examines the experiences of parents who have children living with them in Iceland and who are involved in transnational family life. Focusing on migrant and transnational parents and acknowledging the complexities of international family migration, the aim of the research is to understand how migration and the everyday in Northern Iceland impacts the emotions and the happiness of (1) migrant parents and (2) transnational parents living apart from their children. Combining transnational family research and happiness studies, the project draws on 'the affective turn' in anthropology and other social sciences, in which emotions and senses are conceptualised to explore human mobility (Svašek, 2012). Questions of happiness, and more generally emotions, are an important part of the life of migrants and are deeply embedded in the migration experience (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015). Emotion work underpins transnational migrants' cross-border and family practices as they evolve over time. Emotions are a bridge between the individual and the social and are 'mutually constitutive of a social reality' (ibid, p.74) and of social relations. Migrants' emotional lives are also dependant on the context in which they live, and the social rules and policies they abide by.

Paying attention to context, this theoretical and ethnographic research explores the impact of living in Iceland on migrant parents' emotions and (un)happiness and interrogates how migrant parents harmonise their parenting and migration choices to (positively) influence their own happiness. The thesis aims to understand how aspirations and a hope for better shapes experiences and the emotional landscape of transnational and migrant parents in Iceland. It also explores the relationship between individual well-being and the broader societal context, showing how this context influences emotions and contributes to enhance or to diminish happiness and prosperity. The chapters of this thesis are preoccupied with the influence of specific aspects of life in Iceland on the possibility of happiness for transnational and migrant parents. The overarching research question explores how the experiences of transnational and migrant parents in Iceland, both positive and negative aspects, can provide insights into the concepts of migration, family dynamics, emotions and the pursuit of happiness. While some research in Iceland has explored migrants' integration experiences and encounters, there is limited understanding of how these occurrences influence the overall happiness and emotions of migrants, particularly considering the interplay between family relationships and the broader societal context.

How does the unique interplay of socio-cultural factors and environmental conditions in Iceland influence transnational and migrant parents' aspirations, pursuit of personal fulfillment, growth, and flourishing? More specifically, the study attempts to answer the following research questions:

How do preconceived notions and images of Iceland's and the 'North' influence the migration choices, aspirations and trajectories of transnational migrants? (Chapter 4)

What practices support the constitution of transnational family bonds across borders, and how do they influence the emotional experiences of migrant and transnational parents? (Chapter 5)

How do different forms of presence contribute to emotional work experienced by parents who live apart from their children? (Chapter 6)

What influence do Icelandic parenting beliefs, methods, and attitudes towards child-rearing and education have on the happiness levels of migrant parents? (Chapter 7)

How does the interaction between gender, parental responsibility, and emotions shape the experiences of migrant and transnational parents? How does this interaction redefine gender roles in transnational migration? (Chapter 8)

How does the negotiation of caregiving responsibilities by migrant and transnational parents in Iceland affect their sense of prosperity and happiness? How does the broader Icelandic societal context influence the aspirations and life outcomes of migrant and transnational parents? (Chapter 9)

This research on parental separation in migration and on transnational families explores interconnected themes that influence the experiences of migrant families. Central to this exploration are the migrants' expectations and hopes for a better life, as well as the emotions that they experience such as absence, guilt, and hope. Within the context of separation, families navigate dynamics of maintaining connections across distance, engaging in both tangible and intangible kin-making practices to sustain bonds. Co-presence and digital presence emerge as crucial aspects of transnational family life, as families use technology to bridge physical gaps. The role of imagination is explored to understand how hope and fantasies shape ideas about future trajectories. Moreover, the study examines broader societal structures, conditions and norms that intersect with the experiences of transnational families. Employment, financial conditions, gender dynamics, the transmission of childhood values and the negotiation of parenting practices and ideologies amid diverse socio-economic and societal contexts are scrutinised.

The exploration of these questions and themes aims to provide a more rigorous understanding of the relationship between aspirations, migration, family relations, and happiness in the Icelandic context. The thesis is divided into ten chapters and each of

chapter four to nine examines the research questions stated above based on the participants experiences. The first three chapters introduce the study, the literature, and the methodology. After the introduction which explains the motivation and the context for this research, chapter two develops a theoretical overview on migration theory, transnationalism and happiness, and offers a short historical background to Icelandic history and migration research in Iceland. Although migration to Iceland is a relatively new and rapidly changing phenomenon, scholarship on migration-related issues in the country has been extensively researched in the past ten years. Chapter three describes the methodology used in this research, discusses its ethical implications, reports on the methods used to conduct the ethnography and provides information about the participants involved in the research.

Chapters 4 to 9 are preoccupied with transnational and migrant parents' experiences and encounters. Chapter four describes the role of geographical imaginations in the migration decision and focuses on the participants' narratives and representations of Northern Iceland (see the Methodology for an explanation of my focus on this region). Through an account of their narratives, this chapter aims to show that migration decision-making always includes a hope for *better*.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 focus on family-making and parenting practices in migration. Chapter five describes the construction of the transnational family through practices of being, doing and displaying family and argues that care is essential to parental well-being in this research. The chapter reports on the various practices which are established in transnational families to display care and affection from afar. Chapter six delves into the exploration of emotions and their manifestation across different forms of presence within transnational families. It recognises the emotional experience and subjectivities of migrant parents in the context of the physical absence of their children. The chapter shows that the absence of their children is a constant source of pain and guilt for transnational parents in this research, often counterbalanced by hope. Visits alleviate this pain, but they require financial resources and time. Chapter seven explores the parenting styles of the participants and the occasional conflicts that arises from differences in parenting ideologies and practices between place of origin and place of residence. Additionally, it examines parental convictions and principles regarding childhood and education. Migrant parents place significant emphasis on the upbringing and happiness of their children which they try to navigate in the Icelandic context while fulfilling their own parenting approach.

Chapters 8 and 9 focus on the broader societal aspects that influence transnational and migrant parents' lives in Iceland, such as gender relations, employment, time allocation and income. Chapter eight focuses on the gendered experiences and perceptions of the participants, specifically in relation to parenting and parental roles. While gender remains a pivotal aspect and is interconnected to several dimensions of this work, the main analysis focuses on migrant and transnational parents and therefore does not

delve very deeply into gender-related issues. The analysis of gender in a single chapter is driven by the need for a focused examination and a recognition that the concept is significant within the broader context of the research. Iceland strongly encourages a dual-earner framework in the family, which does not always suit the needs of all migrant families. Chapter nine examines the experiences of migrant and transnational parents in relation to the care-giving capabilities framework as described by Merla and Baldassar (2011) and Kilkey and Merla (2013). The chapter reflects on the broader Icelandic societal context and its influence on migrants' socio-economic conditions, education, employment opportunities and support from family and friends. Chapter ten offer conclusions to this work. It reflects on the exploration of migrant parents' emotions and happiness by considering more broadly the contribution to knowledge, providing recommendations for policy and practice, and by suggesting implications for future research on parenting, migration, and happiness. The study unravels the emotional journey of transnational and migrant parents in Iceland, from life expectations to life outcomes. It suggests that feelings of hope for the future gives coherence and assurance to the life of migrant parents of this study, especially those who may face difficulties or a disjunction between their desire and their experience.

Together, the chapters provide an overview of migrant and transnational parents' perspectives on life and happiness in Iceland and on navigating their relationships with their children within and beyond borders.

2 Theoretical overview and context

Before delving into the ethnography, it is necessary to elaborate on the scholarship that is central to this research. As a combination of migration and transnational studies and happiness studies, the research draws on conceptual and theoretical insights from anthropology and other disciplines. This chapter begins with a discussion of international migration theory and transnational literature, transnational family research and emotions and happiness scholarship. I then move on to provide information about relevant Icelandic history and context, and close the chapter by reviewing migration research in Iceland relevant for this study.

2.1 International migration theory and transnational literature

Before the "transnational turn" in migration studies which occurred in the 1990s, the majority of researchers understood migration very much as a one-way phenomenon, with individuals uprooting themselves from one country to settle in another. As it became obvious that most often this framework did not adequately represent migrants' experiences or situations (Basch et al., 1994; Levitt & Nyberg-Sorensen, 2004), the concept of transnationalism emerged as a phenomenon accounting for the multiple allegiances and connections which migrants hold with various places. Although the term transnationalism had been introduced in research in the early 1970s, it became widespread in migration studies with the influence of the work of Nina Glick Schiller and her co-authors in the 1990s, who argued that a "transnational perspective on migration [is necessary] to understand contemporary migration" (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). Basch, Glick Shiller and Szanton Blanc (1994) understood transnational migration as "the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (p. 6). Building on these ideas, Levitt and Nyberg-Sørensen (2004) argued that migrants "must be studied within the transnational social fields in which they may or may not be embedded" rather than within a nation-state. Earlier, Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc (1992) used their own research to describe transnationalism in the following way:

> When comparing our observations of the social relations of immigrants to the United States from three different areas – the eastern Caribbean, Haiti, and the Philippines – we found that migrants from each population were forging and sustaining multistranded social relations that linked their societies of origin and settlement. We called this immigrant experience "transnationalism" to emphasize the emergence of a social process in which migrants establish social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and

> political borders. Immigrants are understood to be transmigrants when they develop and maintain multiple relations- familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political- that span borders. (Glick Schiller et al., 1992: ix)

The term was contested by several scholars who argued that transnationalism was an ambiguous notion (Kivisto, 2001; Portes et al., 1999) and that it was not a new paradigm (Morawska, 2001). The latter objection pertains to whether transnationalism is different from older understandings of cross-national relationships or from concepts such as cultural pluralism (Kivisto, 2001). Although transnationalism is understood by most scholars as a by-product of and/or a reaction to global capitalism, made possible by innovation and communication technologies that allow a high frequency of contacts between various groups, places and objects, several scholars have questioned its innovative aspect. Munro (2015), for example, contends that contacts and allegiances between various places have always existed amongst migrant groups. Mostly applying quantitative methods, Portes and his co-authors (1999) argue that migrants are only transnational when the activities they engage in across borders are regular and sustained. Such views can be problematic, however, as they almost automatically disqualify as transnational migrants who cannot sustain frequent relationships, such as refugees and humanitarian migrants (Munro, 2015), although such migrants may feel transnational at heart and sustain affective and symbolic relationships with(in) their home countries (O'Byrne, 2021).

Another objection to the transnational framework posits that its research and analysis are often realised using a nation-state logic instead of a transnational one, thus leading to the reinforcement of methodological nationalism (Dahinden, 2016; Glick Schiller, 2007). Glick Schiller is critical of these earlier perspectives which consistently focus on the nation state as the primary unit of analysis, and she calls for more fluidity and transnational perspectives in migration scholarship. The use of nation-state logic to investigate transnationalism can encourage assimilationist and integrationist approaches to migration studies (Glick Schiller, 2007). Similarly, Dahinden (2016) invites researchers examining migration to use more reflexivity in their research by questioning the institutionalisation of migration and the way it transpires in scholarship who often uses the same discourses and categories as the nation state. Questions raised by nation states and by some researchers about transnational engagement often implicitly doubt the loyalty and commitment of migrants to their 'host' countries (Glick Schiller et al., 1995). This leads to migration and integration research reproducing "categories of differences" (Dahinden, 2016, p. 2210) between individuals by using and naturalising state discourses and policies (*ibid.*). Migration scholars advocate shifting the focus of such studies from reflecting the concerns of nation states to developing a reflexive approach that avoids the pitfalls of methodological nationalism and the narrowness of the integration lens. Methodological nationalism is described as "the naturalization of the nation-state by the social sciences. Scholars who share this intellectual orientation

assume that countries are the natural units for comparative studies, equate society with the nation-state, and conflate national interests with the purposes of social science" (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2006, p. 576). Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2006) oppose this view and follow a transnational perspective in their own studies to reflect the fluidity and dynamic quality of migration.

Other scholars actively pursue other paths, such as emphasising the importance of the local over the national. In doing so, they avoid looking at migration from a narrow nation-state perspective. Many prefer to use the translocal concept rather than the transnational framework to study mobility, in particular when looking at forcibly displaced populations (Halilovich, 2011). Translocalism describes the connections that exist between two specific locales. Halilovich (2011) contends that translocalism can be more relevant than transnationalism because it shows how mobility and attachment to various places and cultures are not necessarily contradictory processes, but rather build upon each other in local communities.

Following Glick Schiller et al. (1992), this project conceives transnationalism as the establishment of social fields connecting multiple geographic, cultural and political localities. However, it considers that the intensity of the relationships between these fields and localities has little bearing on its definition. Transnationalism has called for new conceptualisations and interpretations of mobility, and contemporary forms of migration have developed specific characteristics in the midst of neoliberal globalisation. Just as social identities and practices have evolved to be conceptualised as hybrid, multiple and fluid (Appadurai, 1996; Verkuyten et al., 2019), individuals are no longer necessarily bound by staticism in their everyday lives. Individuals across the world rarely stay in the same location for all their lives. However, this does not mean that transnationalism is unbounded (Smith & Guarnido, 2016), since it is regulated by social relations and the various social, cultural and political actors of a particular place. Smith and Guarnido (2016) also argue that although a trend in scholarship celebrates transnationalism – and transmigration in particular – as a set of practices resisting neoliberal logic and nation-state agendas, transnationalism is not exempt from inequalities, domination, gender and class conflict or racism. Rather, it encourages us to "rethink received ideas regarding class, nationals, ethnicity and race" (Kivisto, 2001, p. 554).

The advantage of working with the transnational concept is that it has seen the emergence of important topics of investigation in migration studies, such as gender, transnational families and parenting (Munro, 2015), which are central to this thesis. Several thematic fields have also emerged out of transnational studies, including economic, political, social and cultural ties (*ibid.*).

2.2 Transnational family research

The conceptualisation of transnational families has emerged out of the necessity to describe a family form which is not new but increasingly visible (Baldassar et al., 2014), as the economies of many households rely on the mobility of their family members (Skaptadóttir & Wojtyńska, 2008). Transnational families encapsulate all family members whose lives extend beyond national borders, not only those who *go* but also those who *stay* (Baldassar et al., 2014). Family life is increasingly undertaken across borders, and transnational family studies examine the sustenance of family relations through its processes and practices (Reynolds & Zontini, 2014).

Schmalzbauer points out how transnational migration theory illustrates the experiences of individuals and families who establish themselves beyond the borders of one nation state (2004). She understands transnationalism as a reaction to structural inequalities and as a survival path for destitute and underemployed workers across the world, allowing members of a family to increase their employment and financial opportunities. Although not new, the transnational family form has been made more visible by "inequality in the global economy" (*ibid.,* p. 1329). In this vein, it is important to focus on the extended family who enable parental migration by caring for the children of their relatives. Based on her studies of Honduran families, Schmalzbauer contend that "the nuclear family structure [is] out of reach for poor families" who need to rely on extended support networks to care for their children (2004, p. 1320). Similarly, the nationally based family, with all family members living in the same country, also becomes inaccessible for destitute families, who rely on international mobility to survive. Deprived families depend on the mobility of several family members to sustain those who stay behind in their home countries. Schmalzbauer's argument is well-founded, although we should note that transnationalism is also the daily bread of the international elite such as diplomats and business (wo)men, who also rely on mobility for their career endeavours and depend intensively on care providers outside the nuclear family (Hochschild, 2003).

The contributions in Bryceson and Vuorela's influencial book*, The transnational family* (2002), examine the ways through which family networks are sustained across borders, and how transnational migrants make use of their family and social networks to benefit or sustain their lifestyles. The introduction to their book highlights the importance of understanding transnational family practices as a negotiation. Familyhood, belonging and social identification imply various levels of allegiance and investment. While discussing families living in and between several nation states, Vuorela (2002) sees no conflict between belonging to a nation and to a family and living a transnational life. She argues that both are "constructions with political and emotional underpinnings, and do not necessarily implicate each other" (p. 63). Her account of a family which over four generations has spanned four continents shows that allegiances and loyalties to particular places and identities vary greatly between different members of the family.

Despite the family's multinational and multilingual composition, with nuclear family members dispersed across different countries and cultures, one of the participants asserts that the essence of family remains unchanged. Regardless of geographical distance or cultural diversity, family members actively strive to maintain their sense of connectedness, demonstrating affection, love, and care through shared practices and rituals.

As a consequence of increased mobility in the XXIst century, new forms of parenthood, family interaction and family practices have emerged. In transnational families, sending parcels, remittances and consumer goods has increasingly been coupled with care practices using Information and Communication Technology (Leifsen & Tymczuk, 2012). Emotional practices beyond borders include sending remittances, which are important to the economy of many 'sending states' such as the Philippines (Madianou 2016), the circulation of care between family members (Baldassar & Merla, 2014), objects, values, and persons (Leifsen & Tymczuk, 2012). Such practices are destined to convey relatives' emotions to one another and to maintain intimate relationships between family members at home and away. Information and Communication Technologies have sped up and simplified family connections across borders. For instance, the proliferation and use of mobile phones in all social strata in the Philippines has facilitated parenting from a distance and allowed mothers to engage in daily life parenting while living abroad to work (Madianou & Miller, 2011). In her study on UK-based Filipinos, Madianou (2016) argues that social networking sites result in mediated co-presence, which involves an increased awareness and participation in family members' activities and lifestyles abroad. She points out that mediated co-presence has powerful emotional consequences which can be both positive (i.e., increased intimacy), and negative (i.e., surveillance).

Care is probably one of the most examined concepts in transnational family literature. The conceptualisation of caregiving practices across borders has been defined by a set of capabilities which define how much time and how many possibilities there are to care (Kilkey & Merla, 2013; Merla & Baldassar, 2011). Introducing the concept of "care circulation", Baldassar and Merla (2014) argue that transnational family members participate in various "circuits of care" in which close relatives or broader family networks successfully receive care from or give care to other members of the family. Merla (2012) describes how a cultural sense of obligation draws Salvadoran refugees living in Australia to care for their elderly parents through mobility (visits) and communication (letters, telephone calls, internet conversations). Baldassar and Merla's introduction perfectly exemplifies the notion of "circuits of care", in which a female domestic migrant migrates to work as a nanny for children in Australia while her own children are looked after by relatives or a live-in carer. The authors draw on a large care chains literature to indicate that care is embedded in a complex give-and-take system in transnational families. Following other social scientists and in particular socio-anthropolologists and geographers, Baldassar and Merla (2014) call for an

understanding of the family which challenges ideal and simplistic accounts of family as a coherent unit. The family is highly fluid, dynamic, and adaptable, and it is important to look at the processes which constitute family across time and space to uncover how transnational family practices produce kin relations across distance (ibid.).

Families are constituted as transnational by the mobility of some of their members and they are distinctive for being involved in transnational activities. Although migration has often been considered as an individual decision, recent scholarship has highlighted the role of the family and family agency in migration decision-making (Bryceson, 2019). Bryceson argues that family influence has been downplayed in scholarship until recently and that transnational research is moving away from considering the individual migrant as the focus of enquiry to take into consideration various members of the family. The family is a set of changing and various practices and relationships (Bell & Bivand Erdal, 2015), and transnational families negotiate being together or being apart like other families do. Bell and Bivand Erdal (2015) argue that transnational family processes are comprised of ways of doing and ways of being, the latter involving less perceptible processes such as "emotional attachments, identity construction processes [and] negotiating belonging" (p.79).

Transnationalism implies geographical separation from friends, communities and social support networks, and it implies family separation. Some of the scholarship on distance and separation in transnational family characterises distant care as deficient and "less than ideal or somehow inadequate" (Baldassar, 2016, p.146). Transnational family life can be accepted depending on family formation, gender, ethnicity and class. Literature on destitute or undocumented mothers living transnationally often focuses on the negative repercussions of their migration on their dependent children living under the care of relatives (Baldassar, 2016; Nicholson, 2006). The depiction of distress and suffering of family members living transnationally, and in particular mothers, often corresponds to the constraints of immigration and citizenship status and resources available to these individuals. The deficient aspect of transnational caregiving is most prominent in research on undocumented and poor families. This correlation between distance and disfunction is problematic, as Baldassar (2016) points out. She argues that physical presence is not a guarantee for family harmony, nor is physical absence a guarantee for family suffering.

Exploring the perceived dysfunctional and fragmented nature of transnational families is useful to challenge normative understandings of the family and to question the hierarchisation of migrants according to their race, ethnicity, gender, class and mobility choices -for this is what can lay beneath concerns over distance, an underlying indictment of individuals' choices and conditions. Most of the literature on transnational families reminds us that the nuclear family sharing one roof model is primarily a western idea and may very well be an ideal more than anything. In many parts of the world several generations live in one shared household and the care of children fall

under the responsibility of the extended family rather than the parents. More broadly, academic scholarship has demonstrated that the production of the family is undergoing constant change, most notably (but not exclusively) in mobility contexts when families experience movement and separation. Family scholars have asked researchers to pay greater attention to different dimensions and shapes of relationality and togetherness which go beyond the idea of family as a restricted entity and unity. Transnational lives unsettle the meaning of 'stable', 'bounded' and 'continuous' families, whereas family scholars call for an exploration of fragmentation and disruption (Baldassar, 2016) which exist in every family -not only migrant ones.

The relationship between spatial mobility and family ties is well-established in scholarship, and family ties play a pivotal role in shaping the trajectories of both international and internal migrants (Thomas, 2019). Many families around the globe are separated from their loved ones by significant distances, within or across borders. The challenges of family-making without geographical proximity are experienced by many, whether it is the international migrants of this research or internal migrants separated by temporary labour or other factors (see for example Awumbila, 2015; White, 2019).

The focus on transnational migrants in this research is dictated by the sharp increase in international migrants to Iceland in the past decade and the necessity to understand the experiences of this population. Icelandic society has been changing rapidly over the past fifteen years, and knowledge on international migrants' choices, needs and experiences is valuable. While most research on migration in Iceland focuses on important topics such as employment, income, and language, it seems crucial to explore the subjectivities of migrants and to understand the affective dimension of transnational experiences and the ways they are shaped in the Icelandic context.

A vast amount of transnational scholarship focuses on parenthood. Numerous publications highlight the impact of parental migration on children who are 'left behind' (e.g., Botezat & Pfeiffer, 2014), and some attention has been devoted to the influence of parental migration on the parents themselves. Moreover, transnational studies have unveiled the different understandings of parenthood that exist between different ethnic and social groups. For example, Nicholson (2006, p. 14) argues that:

> Latin American immigrant women are operating within a conceptual framework that differs from the ideal exclusive motherhood [in the US] considered normative from a white, middle-class perspective. They are enacting conceptions of mothering that reflect what many African American, Hispanic and Asian American women have long understood: that economic conditions often necessitate the sharing of child-rearing responsibilities with others, preferably with family members.

For destitute immigrant mothers living away from their children who remain with family members, employment, and the ability to remit are just as valid domains of motherhood

as any others, since they contribute to the family economy and well-being (Nicholson, 2006; Schmalzbauer, 2004). The absence of a parent in transnational contexts does not imply abandonment of or disinterest in their children but may rather be considered a necessary response to limited economic resources (Nicholson, 2006).

Gender-based expectations and parental-role perceptions reinforce the emotional experiences of both mothers and fathers. Traditional views characterise fathers as breadwinners and mothers as nurturers, hence scholars contend that the children experience more emotional pain when the mother departs to work abroad (Parreñas, 2001). The focus in analyses of transnational parenthood is often placed on motherhood (Haagsman and Mazzucato, 2013; Kilkey et al., 2013), and sociology often reflect these conventional gender perspectives depicting the mother as the primary nurturer (Gíslason & Símonardóttir, 2018; Símonardóttir, 2016). On the other hand, negative depictions of men in transnational literature prevail and transnational and migrant fathers are portrayed as showing little concern for, or even neglect of their children (Poeze, 2019; Pribilsky, 2012). Gender-based expectations and parental roles have a significant impact on the affective experiences of transnational parents (Parreñas, 2001; Vermot, 2015). In a migration context, parental-role expectations, and the possibly conflicting ideologies between parenting practices between home country and host country, have a significant effect on the emotions and affective experiences of migrant parents (Renzaho et al, 2011).

In this research project on transnational parenting and parental separation in transnational contexts, parenting practices and ideologies are being examined. Transnational parenthood research sets out to understand how parenting is carried out in diverse and multicultural contexts (Bendixsen & Danielsen, 2019) and the ways in which migrant parents may identify with or against dominant and normative family practices, and how this affects their emotions. One example of such practices could be the way parents understand the school system (Gunnþórsdóttir et al, 2018), or how parents understand the demands of childcare and employment in their host country. Sanagavarapu (2010) claims that hybridised parenting is likely to occur in immigrant families who navigate multiple cultures. Migrant parents question their own orientations because they come in close contact with different parenting values, beliefs and strategies in the host country (Ochocka & Janzen, 2008). In hybridised parenting, migrant parents both adapt their parenting practices according to Icelandic socio-cultural expectations while preserving their own (Kabatanya & Vagli, 2021). Examining views on education and schooling is a good way of delving into these practices because this is where cultural integration and negotiation take place. Migrant parents may encounter challenges in implementing hybrid parenting approaches and may face difficulties in reconciling their own cultural practices with those of the host country, as observed for example in Icelandic compulsory schools (Peskova & Ragnarsdóttir, 2016). Examining the dynamics behind parenting ideologies and practices is a useful way to understand how transnationalism impact the everyday of migrant families, and

how migrants reconcile their own cultural contexts and values with the host country's perspective. Turtiainen and Hiitola (2018) claim that the (negative) perceptions of migrants' parenting styles can lead to stigmatisation and racism and affect migrant parents' sense of belonging and emotions.

Mahler and Pessar also advocate devoting attention to gender roles and ideologies, since gender is understood as a "critical force shaping migrations" and transnational lives (Mahler & Pessar, 2006; p. 27). Before 1980, women in migration were most often described as trailing spouses or 'associational migrants' (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Cranford, 2006, p.105). Although feminist migration scholarship has greatly increased in the past three decades, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Cranford (2006) invite researchers to shift the focus from women to gender and gender relations, which examines the interplay between socio-cultural 'ideals, displays and practices of masculinity and femininity' (p.105). Migration studies have recognised that the focus on gender encompasses inquiries on topics which go far beyond men and women, and that it can be a useful lense to examine labour, transnationalism, discrimination, violence, sexuality, citizenship, etc (Christou & Kofman, 2022). Gender social relations influence and change with migration, as does happiness. The relationship between gender and migration is well established in scholarship (ibid.), although the same cannot be said of the relationship between gender and happiness for which little is known (Meisenberg & Woodley, 2015), especially within the migration context. Gender equality is often framed as an unquestionable good, but does it increase wellbeing and happiness? Several studies report that improvements in gender equality rights coincide with a decrease in well-being among women (ibid.; Graham & Chattopadhyay, 2012), but the reasons explaining this are speculative at best (Meisenberg & Woodley, 2015). Conceiving happiness as an important topic of inquiry for men and women's migration is intrinsic to this work. Gender is an important dimension of parental migration. Although gender transpires throughout this work, the empirical examination has not focused specifically on gender, but rather laid a foundation upon which future research could be build.

2.3 A dash of happiness

While there is a vast amount of literature on the socio-economic benefits of migration and numerical data from happiness surveys, ethnographies contending with the (un)happiness of migrants are scarce. Most research connecting migration and happiness examines "objective" determinants of well-being such as economic gain or employment or are concerned with numerical data relating to "subjective" aspects of well-being (Diener & Lucas, 2000). Stillman et al. (2015) sees academic literature in several fields explaining that migrants are often dissatisfied with their lives but contend that data on this particular topic is too unreliable to make this claim. A comparison of levels of happiness of people before they migrate and after, which could be used to claim that happiness increases or decreases with migration, remains unavailable.

Stillman et al. add that data is irrelevant when it compares happiness 'scores' of migrants and non-migrants, because the causal impact of migration on happiness levels remains unknown. Comparing the happiness levels of Eastern European migrants and 'stayers', Bartram (2013) notices that migrants appear happier than stayers but notes that the propensity for migrating is also higher among people who have higher happiness levels.

Etymologically, happiness means 'good fortune' (Duncan, 2005) but the meaning of the word has shifted, and most English speakers today consider happiness to be the result of personal choices and associate happiness with good feelings. Apart from those, 'there is no specific content [...] associated with happiness, and individuals are left to use their own criteria for judging their own happiness' (ibid. p.22). From early on, the concept has been used following moral, then economic reasoning. The concept of happiness occupies a central place in neoliberal utilitarian economy as signified by Bentham who understands it as a psychological experience and the 'sum of pleasures and pain' (in Veenhoven, 2015). Similarly, wellbeing can be measured and monitored and therefore attached to an economic logic working around particular 'needs' or 'functions'. Focusing on the qualitative rather than the quantitative aspect of happiness and well-being, this thesis focuses on the subjectivities of migrant parents from their perspective, and understands 'happiness' as a sense of prosperity and general contentment expressed by the participants. It explores how the everyday in Iceland and the conditions in which one lives can shape emotions and increase or decrease happiness and pain.

The idea that migration is motivated by the wish to improve one's life is deeply embedded in migration studies (Hendriks & Bartram, 2019). The science and economics of happiness have certainly become popular both in academic research and popular culture (Ahmed, 2008), and "migration scholars have a long-standing interest in migrants' well-being" (Hendriks and Bartram, 2019: p. 279). There are however few ethnographic studies about happiness among migrants. There is a strong body of literature focusing on the relationship between economic status and happiness in international migration (Bartram, 2015; Calvo, 2018; Hendriks, 2015; Kratz, 2020; Melzer, 2011) and between economic practices such as remittances and affective kinship (see, for example, Boccagni, 2012). Scholars agree that income does not necessarily increase happiness, and the relationship between migrant happiness and income remains to be proven (Bartram, 2013). Hendriks (2015: p. 344) focuses on the 'forecasting biases' that push migrants to focus on monetary gain, when it is the non-monetary gain which will improve happiness the most for migrants. It has been shown that the majority of migrants across the world gains from migration in one way or another, with a small minority who does not (Helliwell et al., 2018). The same study shows that migrants become happier if they move to a happier country than their own; and that happiness of migrants generally does not increase with the number of years spent in the country. Stillman et al. (2012) content that aspirations can cause frustration

and unhappiness, as migrants' income and status do not always match their expectations. Desired and imagined living conditions may result in disappointment rather than pure happiness gain (Hendriks, 2015).

This project draws on 'the affective turn' in anthropology and other social sciences, in which emotions and senses are conceptualised to explore human mobility (Svašek, 2012). The affective turn in anthropology aimed to recognise how affect and emotions were captured (or not) and composed through different discourses and languages (White, 2017). Consideration of the embodied experiences of migrants can be useful in understanding the cultural contexts and constructions in which they evolve and can contribute to the conceptualisation of mobility and transnationalism (ibid.). Svašek (2012) argues that emotional processes shape mobility and migration because legal and socio-economic factors influence the ways in which migration is experienced. Beyond the binary logic of 'happiness' which cannot be conceived as a dual opposition of 'being happy' or 'being unhappy', this project tries to understand the complexities and nuances of migrant parents' emotions and lives in Iceland. It accounts for the needs and wants of migrants necessary to personal fulfilment and prosperity and reflects on what improves migrants' positive feelings and emotions.

In 'The Wherewithal of Life', Michael Jackson (2013) converses with three migrants to explore the losses and gains that all humans go through. He explains that ways to 'be in the world', which are not living our best life but striving to, is what characterizes all human experience. What I propose to do here is to explore the joys and pains that constitute (migrants') lives. The thesis pays attention to the experiences and emotions of migrant parents and their outcomes. At the intersection of mobility and family studies, this project is not only interested in understanding how migrant parents negotiate losses and gains, but in appreciating what (un)happiness does to migrant and transnational parents in the Icelandic context. The project aims to understand how the emotions of transnational and migrant parents in Iceland are shaped by normative and structural influences encountered during migration. An exploration of the impact of Icelandic societal norms and broader structural factors on migrants' emotional well-being will provide insights into their experiences.

2.4 Below the Arctic circle: Iceland

Iceland's geographical situation as a relatively remote island kept it relatively free from human migration until the late twentieth century. However, political ties and economic circumstances have shaped migratory flows throughout Icelandic history. Iceland joined the Kingdom of Norway in the thirteenth century before it merged with Denmark in 1383; consequently, Iceland was incorporated into Denmark and remained under Danish rule until its independence in 1944 (Magnússon, 2010). While external relations with Norway and then Denmark were prepotent until the eighteenth century, several nations sent foreign merchants and fishermen to Iceland, such as England in the

fifteenth century and Germany in the sixteenth (Þórhallsson & Kristinsson, 2013). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, European aristocrats travelled to the small island to learn about secluded societies in Europe and wondered about Iceland and its people, which they respectively saw as barren and indolent (Magnússon, 2010).

Although urbanisation was government policy in the eighteenth century (Agnarsdóttir, 2013), Iceland at the time did have an air of desolation compared to the rest of Europe, as it remained almost entirely rural, with poor infrastructure and communication (Magnússon, 2010); the biggest settlement, Reykjavík, had a population of 311 in 1801 (Agnarsdóttir, 2013). It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that the population of Iceland recovered from earlier natural and economic disasters, increased steadily and started to develop agriculture, fisheries and trade (*ibid*.).

Population growth increased the number of farms and livestock, which in turn allowed an export market to develop. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the fishing industry and foreign trade also grew considerably, and this resulted in a marked improvement in the standard of living in the country (Karlsson, 2000). However, prosperity did not last long, as the climate grew colder and an epidemic of scab killed almost half of the sheep population of Iceland, depriving thousands of Icelanders of their livelihood (*ibid*.). From 1870 until 1914, an estimated 15% of the population left Iceland to settle in North America, particularly Canada.

At the end of the nineteenth century, progress and urbanisation in Iceland coincided with the aspiration to become a modern capitalist nation, and a gust of freedom blew across the small island to emancipate itself from Danish sovereignty. After seven decades of political struggle (Karlsson, 1995), Iceland relinquished its ties to Denmark to become an independent republic in 1944. However, cultural ties between the two countries remained strong, and while Danes constituted only 1% of the Icelandic population in 1815 (*ibid*.), they remained the main immigrant group in Iceland until the late nineteen-nineties. In 1998, the Danes stopped being the largest foreign community in Iceland, and this marks a turning point in Icelandic immigration history (Skaptadóttir & Garðarsdóttir, 2020; Wojtyńska, 2011).

The exodus of Icelanders for North America at the end of the nineteenth century established Iceland primarily as a country of emigration, but it became a country of immigration at the turn of the millennium. Prior to this date, there had been few immigration movements, most notably the arrival of 300 German citizens (mostly women) recruited to work on Icelandic farms, of whom half stayed on afterwards and established themselves in Iceland (Eiríksson, 2008). Between 2000 and 2008, the number of foreign citizens in Iceland increased over 220%, from 7271 to 23421 individuals, until the economic crisis of 2008 resulted in a dramatic drop in immigration. The number of foreign citizens in Iceland reached the same level as in 2008 only in 2015, with a total of 24,294 foreign citizens at that time. However, fifteen years after the crisis, the number of immigrants in Iceland has reached unprecedented

levels, and foreign citizens in 2023 constitute 16.8% of the population (Statistics Iceland, 2023), compared to 2.6% in 2000. Increased job opportunities in the service and construction sectors and the opening of the labour market to citizens of the new member states of the European Union were the main reasons behind this increase (Loftsdóttir & Skaptadóttir, 2016; Ólafsson & Meckl, 2013).

The Polish community is particularly prominent in Iceland and has been the largest immigrant group in the country since 1999. Economic relations between Poland and Iceland have developed since the beginning of the twentieth century and the first Polish workers arrived in Iceland in the sixties; many of them had already been in contact with Icelanders, notably fishermen making extensive use of shipyards in Poland to repair their vessels (Wojtyńska, 2011). Within a total population of 387,758 in 2023, there were 23,352 registered Polish citizens living in Iceland, followed by Lithuanians (5218), Romanians (3667), Latvians (2708) and Ukrainians (2481). The largest immigrant groups from outside Europe are from Venezuela (1261), the Philippines (1232), and the United States (1072) (Statistics Iceland, 2023a). The individuals who are more likely to adopt Icelandic citizenship are from Poland, Vietnam, and the Philippines (Statistics Iceland, 2022).

Although migrants in Iceland are increasingly diverse, the country's immigrant population originates primarily from European countries. Despite Iceland's participation in the global ideological debate about migration from outside Europe (Tryggvadóttir & Loftsdóttir, 2020), and particularly from Muslim countries, Iceland holds only a small population from Africa or Asia. Although Iceland significantly increased its number of international protection permits after 2016, the number of people being granted asylum in the country as a refugee or for humanitarian reasons is still insignificant (468 in 2019; Statistics Iceland, 2020). Immigration in Iceland is first and foremost seen as a driver of economic prosperity, and the "typical" migrant is a labour male migrant from Central Europe (Loftsdóttir, 2017). The strong economic growth experienced by the country in the early 2000s from industry, and after 2010 from tourism has led to a strong demand for foreign workers (Wojtyńska & Skaptadóttir, 2021). Since migrants coming to work in Iceland were not seen as active participants in the long-term economic prosperity of the country but rather a temporary labour force, no policies were in place regarding the inclusion of immigrants in Icelandic society before 2007 (Einarsdóttir et al., 2018). Immigrants are mostly invisible in regional development policy and application (Júlíusdóttir, 2010), despite their role in preventing desertification in rural or semi-rural areas (Ísberg, 2010). The inclusion of immigrants in Icelandic society has started to gain attention and in 2016 the Government set forward the action plan *Framkvæmdaráætlun í málefnum innflytjenda (Implementation plan on immigration matters 2016-2019)*.

The investment of the Icelandic state towards its migrant population has remained focused on education, employment, and welfare, while cultural and social aspects were

neglected until recently. When migrants came to fill positions in services and construction in the early 2000s, Icelandic society imagined that workers were coming to fill the labour gap and go home, not to imagine a future in Iceland (Einarsdóttir et al., 2018). Ten years ago, relatively little was known about migrants in Iceland (Ólafs & Zielińska, 2010) although some scholars were already devoting research to these topics (Skaptadóttir & Wojtyńska, 2008). Today, state-funded and local initiatives include more and more migrants in their endeavours, and Icelandic language classes are widely available and subsidised (Innes & Skaptadóttir, 2017). We are probably witnessing a shift in migration politics in Iceland, while the media and scientific research now widely discuss migration affairs.

Although the term multiculturalism is employed in diverse ways in Iceland, the country has for the most part largely committed to its image of homogeneity and purity (Skaptadóttir & Loftsdóttir, 2016; 2009). Breaking the bond with Denmark resulted in attempts to emphasise Iceland's social and cultural uniqueness, and images of "Icelandicness" die hard, as exemplified by the marketing campaign "Inspired by Iceland" which until very recently depicted white women with fair hair and farmers wearing *lopapeysur* (Icelandic woollen sweaters) in their videos (Lund et al., 2016). This campaign helped to shape Iceland's image in nation-branding as a modern nation 'pure' of foreign influence in the Atlantic North (Loftsdóttir, 2015). In the spring of 2019, however, their latest campaign represented a black man promoting Icelandic *kranavatn*, or tap water, which may show acknowledgement of the increased diversity of the population. Interestingly, the branding of Iceland for tourism purposes probably makes it attractive as a migration destination, as the boundaries between these two forms of mobility become increasingly blurred (Skaptadóttir & Rancew-Sikora, 2016). Images of *borealism* (Schram, 2011) invite the traveler to a pure and safe haven in the middle of the Atlantic, while economic opportunities, relative low unemployment (2.7% in 2019) and ideas about leading a good life also draw migrants to the country. The visibility of both tourists and migrants has greatly increased over the past years. The arrival of Muslim refugees after 2016 has been widely discussed in the media and in academic research in Iceland (Kulik et al., 2019), and has opened discussions about diversity in the country. The election, in 2018, of three foreign workers to the board of Efling, the biggest workers' union in Iceland, was unprecedented (Kozłowska, 2018) and shows that diversity in the labour market begins to be acknowledged and represented. The state-run Icelandic media RÚV started to include a news section about Icelandic affairs in English on its website in 2018 to facilitate societal discussions for those who lived in Iceland but could not understand Icelandic fluently. Nationalist discourses have also gained prominence since 2008 (Helgadóttir & Ólafsson, 2022), showing that the increasing diversity in Iceland is sometimes met with resistance. These four examples reveal a perceptible change in Icelandic society, which is certainly entering a new era, as immigrants and their place in society are becoming more prominent in public and private debates across the island.

Recent immigration unfolded in a particular cultural context where Icelandic family is imagined as the unit with strong emotional ties and considered the 'corner-stone' of Icelandic society' (Eydal & Ólafsson, 2008). There are high expectations about informal support from kin, arguably putting more pressure on family coherence in Iceland than in other Nordic countries (Júlíusdóttir, 2001). Icelandic families are perceived as close-knit, open, and egalitarian (Kerr et al., 2017) and there is greater acceptance of different forms of family than in other European countries (Digoix et al., 2016; White et al., 2010). This acceptance can be connected to the long historical tradition of liberal attitudes to premarital sex relations and the high extramarital childbearing occurring in Iceland (Jónsson, 2021). Moreover, historically, the Icelandic population lived in isolated households of about ten people (Leonard, 2011), which Ísberg (2010) claims may explain the individualist, self-sufficient and independent attitude of Icelandic families. Separation in Icelandic families is a common occurrence: in fishing communities, fishermen are at sea for various lengths of time, and until recently children living in urban areas were sent to live with their relatives or other acquaintances on a farm for most of the summer (Einarsdóttir & Gunnlaugsson, 2019). Up to the beginning of the XXth century, it was common for poor families to be separated and working in different farms (Gunnlaugsson et al. 1997; Ísberg, 2010). Since spatio-temporal separation within the family is generally accepted within the local culture, it may be easier for transnational parents to cope with distance from their children (Krzyżowski & Mucha, 2014).

The geographical location of Iceland has necessitated adjustments which resulted both in welcoming the exchange and travel of foreign goods and individuals, and a wish to preserve Iceland's socio-economic and cultural legacy. The negotiation of this delicate balance is ongoing and can affect residents of Iceland, both natives and non-natives.

2.5 Migration Research in Iceland

While Iceland persists in cultivating an image of homogeneity and self-contained authenticity (Pálsson & Durrenberger, 1996), it nurtures at the same time a commitment to modernity and an engagement in global practices. Icelandic society has changed quickly during the past two decades with the number of immigrants increasing from representing 2.9% of the population of Iceland in 1999 to 18.4% in 2023 (Statistics Iceland, 2023a). Statistics Iceland defines an immigrant as 'a person born abroad with both parents foreign born and all grandparents foreign born'.

While a large proportion of migrants in Northern Iceland declared themselves to be very satisfied with their lives in a survey, parallel stories portraying abuse and disadvantage have started to appear more frequently in research and in the media. The labour market in Iceland remains gender segregated (Júlíusdóttir et al., 2013) and foreign workers – particularly women – are much more likely to be unemployed than individuals born in Iceland (Burdikova et al., 2018). Stories of ill-treatment and human

rights infringements have been reported by the media through reports and various documentaries (Alþýðusamband Íslands, 2019; Seljan et al., 2018; Thorisson & Balvindsdóttir, 2013). Personal experience and sharing accounts of work with other migrants has taught me that exploiting foreign workers is common practice in several sectors and companies in Iceland. The findings of the aforementioned survey conducted in Northern Iceland, showing that most migrants considered themselves happy or very happy (Ólafsson & Meckl, 2013), contradicted the many media portrayals I had seen or read about. The media constantly depicted the struggles and hardships of migrants in Iceland; could there be happy migrants? Had the Icelandic myth of itself as one of the "happiest countries in the world" (Forbes, 2019) contaminated the immigrant population as well?

Conforming to the perception of immigration to Iceland as primarily revolving around work, a large body of academic literature focuses on migration and the labour market, especially after the economic crisis of 2008 (Friberg et al., 2014; Sigurgeirsdóttir & Skaptadóttir, 2011; Skaptadóttir, 2015a; Skaptadóttir & Wojtyńska, 2012; Wojtyńska, 2011; Wojtyńska & Zielińska, 2010). Wojtyńska and Skaptadóttir (2019) note that unemployment became rife among immigrants in Iceland after the economic recession of 2008 and demonstrate how the employment conditions of migrant workers worsened after the crisis. The sharp increase in tourism after 2011 triggered a lot of migration to the country, both temporary and permanent (Minelgaite et al., 2019; Skaptadóttir & Loftsdóttir, 2016), and work-related issues have been in the spotlight of academic research on migration. Several studies indicate that the working conditions and salaries of migrants in Iceland are worse than those of Icelanders (Burdikova et al., 2018; Wojtyńska & Skaptadóttir, 2018), and show the consequences of the hierarchisation and racialisation of migrant workers in Iceland (Loftsdóttir, 2017). Much of the migration literature discusses Polish migrants in Iceland as the largest group of migrants in the country (Skaptadóttir, 2011; Wojtyńska & Skaptadóttir, 2020; Wojtyńska, 2011; Zielińska, 2019), but attention has also been paid to smaller groups of migrants such as Filipinos (Skaptadóttir, 2019; Skaptadóttir, 2010) and Lithuanians (Loftsdóttir, 2017).

Education has also received a great deal of attention in the Icelandic context of migration, and many studies note the multicultural aspects of Icelandic education (Benediktsson & Ragnarsdóttir, 2019; Friðriksdóttir, 2015; Gunnþórsdóttir et al., 2018; Ragnarsdóttir, 2022; Ragnarsdóttir & Jónsdóttir, 2010) or its focus on language learning (Hálfdánarsson, 2003; Innes, 2015; Skaptadóttir & Innes, 2017). Benediktsson and Ragnarsdóttir (2019) indicate that multicultural education in Iceland often fails to show appropriate culturally responsive assessment when it comes to migrant students. Ragnarsdóttir and Jónsdóttir (2010) and Gunnþórsdóttir et al. (2018) argue that the strong push for inclusive and multicultural education in Iceland is diminished by lack of training and good practices among education professionals and practitioners. Skaptadóttir and Innes (2017) demonstrate how knowledge of the Icelandic language is theoretically essential to inclusion into Icelandic society, but can have the opposite

effect as it becomes a "boundary maker" limiting the participation and belonging of migrants.

Because this study is primarily concerned with transnational and migrant parents, it will explore employment and the labour market and Icelandic schools and education. While paid work is a significant concern in the participants' lives, they are putting a lot of thought into the upbringing of their children and have a lot to say about Icelandic schooling and education.

The last decade has seen increasing attention paid to gender in the context of migration, with research devoted to gendered labour (Júlíusdóttir et al., 2013; Napierala & Wojtyńska, 2016; Yingst & Skaptadóttir, 2018) and the intersection between gender and ethnicity (Skaptadóttir, 2015; Skaptadóttir, 2004; Þorvaldsdóttir, 2011). Despite Icelandic efforts to address gender (in)equality in the labour market, women have less access to the labour market than men, are under-represented in most companies, do not often hold management positions, and earn less than their male counterparts (Jafnréttistofa, 2012). The opportunities for immigrant women in the labour market are even worse (Júlíusdóttir et al., 2013; Skaptadóttir & Loftsdóttir, 2020) as they earn less than immigrant men, and much less than Icelandic women (Burdikova et al., 2018). This is in line with prior studies showing that immigrant women face further challenges in the labour market such as being more likely to work shifts than Icelandic women, working longer hours, being more likely to be unemployed than Icelandic women and being very likely to only work with other immigrant women (Skaptadóttir & Loftsdóttir, 2020).

A few scholars have investigated migrants outside the Reykjavík region, although some have mentioned that lifestyle migration, tourism-related work and humanitarian reasons have brought migrants to settle in rural Iceland (Bjarnason, 2020; Kristjánsdóttir & Skaptadóttir, 2019; Wendt et al., 2020). The importance of migration in coastal areas and for the fishing industry has gained little attention, even though migrant women often uphold the survival of small-scale fisheries in rural areas in Iceland (Júlíusdóttir et al., 2013; Yingst & Skaptadóttir, 2018). A study realised in the North of Iceland investigated the tolerance to migrants by Icelanders living in rural areas and postulated that patterns of tolerance are related to personal histories and experiences of (im)mobility. The study shows that tolerance towards migrants is higher when respondents have lived in the capital city or abroad for more than a year (Bjarnason et al., 2019). Kristjánsdóttir and Skaptadóttir (2019) have shown that refugee women in a rural town felt welcome but lonely and disconnected from the wider society. Recently, literature on refugees and individuals seeking asylum has become more prominent in Iceland (Harðardóttir et al., 2019; Ingvarsson et al., 2016; Kristjánsdóttir & Skaptadóttir, 2019; Tryggvadóttir & Skaptadóttir, 2019), and show that disorientation and uncertainty are the main challenges that refugees and people seeking asylum must deal with upon

arriving in Iceland. Studies show that the politics of refugee inclusion often emphasise sameness and equality to the detriment of diversity (Harðardóttir et al., 2021).

Coinciding with the growth in tourism and subsequent interest in tourism studies in Iceland, the increasing connections between recreational traveling and migration have been investigated in an edited volume (Skaptadóttir & Rancew-Sikora, 2016), and tourism-related work has also been investigated (Wendt et al., 2020). These studies are important because they move beyond an understanding of migration which is purely economic. If migrants often want to improve their social and financial situations, there is a variety of reasons that encourages individuals choose to migrate. These reasons deserve to be investigated since the aspirations and expectations of migrants will affect their outlook on life abroad and their satisfaction. Loftsdóttir has extensively investigated how exoticism, nation branding, whiteness, colonialism, and diversity are intertwined in Iceland (Loftsdóttir, 2015; Loftsdóttir, 2012; Lund et al., 2016) and shown how Icelandic self-identity has influenced the affect of migrants in Iceland.

This ethnographic exploration uses concepts which highlight the fluidity of life for migrants in Iceland. The transnational framework recognises the multiple allegiances and identities tied to individuals and the constituton of the family beyond a particular location and culture. The concept of transnationalism is helpful to understand how the participants in this research negotiate their various affinities and how they 'make' family away or in distance. The ways family and parenting practices are constituted include these negotiations of identities and cultures. The concept of happiness is also fluid and can unravel the emotional complexities of living in different places and cultures. Together, these concepts demonstrate how migration permeates the daily life and affects of migrant parents living in Iceland. Within a changing Icelandic context, this research aims to understand how the intersection of all these strands (mobility, employment, parenting, socio-economic conditions, diversity, rurality, etc.) relate to personal and family happiness for migrant and transnational parents. By exploring the influence of both societal and personal and family practices on migrant and transnational parents' experience and affect, I intend to gain insight into their experience of distance and family separation.

3 Methodology

Ethnography's contribution to provide a deep understanding of practices and meanings within a social group is well-founded in anthropology. Understanding the experiences of migrant and transnational parents in Iceland requires a methodological approach which helps to identify and analyse issues and situations which are significant in this context. Ethnographic inquiry can unravel the social meaning of everyday realities. It is a method requiring significant interaction and the formation of a relationship between the researcher and the subject, which is essential to acquire knowledge and awareness of someone's situation. In this research, ethnography is useful because its extensive analysis and attention to detail illustrate adequately the connections between one's social world and one's experience. After explaining the ethnographic tradition in anthropology and how it was applied in this study, the chapter then reflects on doing research both 'at home' and 'away' and on the field as a site of investigation. It then looks at the process of data collection and analysis before discussing the ethical implications of doing ethnography in a small and close-knit community.

3.1 The ethnographic tradition in anthropology

Playing a central and undisputed role in social and cultural anthropology, ethnography[1] is an approach in social research which has strong and diverse roots, and a variety of methods and applications (Atkinson et al., 2001). In this thesis, ethnography refers to a specific method consisting of immersing oneself into a particular context and situation to understand the perspectives of an individual or a group. One of the most important principles of ethnography is participant observation, in which the anthropologist engages with the lives of the participants for a long period of time and engages himself or herself in the world that he wishes to study (Barnard & Spencer, 1996) to understand "the real native mentality" (Malinowski, 1922, p. 5). The conditions in which the ethnographer should collect his information were discussed at length by Malinowski when he explored forms of trade in the islands of New Guinea. "Learn to listen" (Barnard & Spencer, 1996, p. 299) is the first challenge of ethnographic work, as the researcher must be able to turn away from the theoretical baggage that he comes with to listen to others. When he reports and analyses, the researcher's task is to "minimize any distortion of their findings by their political convictions or practical interests"

[1] Ethnography can have several meanings, including 1. The original term used for writing, depicting, or studying culture. 2. 'Ethnographic method' which refers to primary and long term embedded field research. 3. The term 'an ethnography' has become a synonym for an account based on that kind of research method.

(Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 18). The guiding principles of this research has been to listen and to make sense of the narratives and meanings of my participants.

In his writing a century ago, Malinowski argued that data collection must include observations to comprehend not only the meanings of traditions, rituals, and beliefs, but also the private world of indigenous people (Malinowski, 1922). Although dated, Malinowski's commitment to observation and immersion is still relevant today because it emphasises the need to genuinely engage with the individuals and the setting one chooses to study. Bernard and Spencer's "observation of life in natural settings" (1996, p. 551) refers to participant observation, one of the most popular methods of ethnographic research. In anthropology, the role of observation is central (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997) and it is important to pay "attention to mundane detail" (Bryman 1988, in Silverman, 2006, p. 68). Data can be collected while "looking as well as listening" (Silverman, 2006, p. 85). This ethnographic approach allows the researcher to gather information which may assist the study. Immersing oneself in a culture and a context allows for more interactions with the groups we set to understand. During the time of the research, I lived in the North of Iceland with my family, in the town where the study took place. Thus, I had various opportunities to get insights into the life of migrant parents, to engage in informal conversations and to witness various situations during events. Many of these interactions and events, as well as thoughts before and after interviews, were recorded in field notes. These informal conversations and situations were helpful to contextualise the study and provided additional knowledge for the research.. I have used field notes to situate better the context of the interviews and to underpin the analysis, but the main data analysed in this thesis comes from interviews which is the most common methodological approach in ethnographic research in anthropology (Crang & Cook, 2007).

3.2 At home and away

The momentum for this research project came about as a series of thoughts and encounters in Northern Iceland, where I settled with my family. When I started this PhD, I had already been living in Northern Iceland for three and a half years and I was entangled in research projects and personal friendships with many migrants living in this part of the country. The research took place in Akureyri, the second biggest urban agglomeration of the country and the largest town in Northern Iceland. Akureyri is a dynamic industrial and service centre with a population of 19 720, including 1973 immigrants[2] (Statistics Iceland, 2023b). Like elsewhere in Iceland, Akureyri has experienced a large increase in incoming migration in the past decades. In terms of services, infrastructure and educational and cultural provision, Akureyri can be

[2] In 2017, which is when most of the interviews took place, the town had 18800 inhabitants, including 931 immigrants.

classified as a city as it is host to a university, a hospital, several museums, a ski resort, and a wide range of shops and services to service its inhabitants, as well as those who live in rural areas nearby.

Classic anthropological conceptions of 'the field' involve both geographical and cultural displacement, while 'fieldwork' invokes the idea of the exploration of the remote (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). A more recent conception argues that doing anthropology 'at home' involves similar endeavours and challenges as anthropology 'away' (Mughal, 2015). As a migrant 'at home' in Akureyri, where did I fit within this anthropological tradition of being neither completely 'at home' nor 'away'? Both conceptions of the field 'at home' and 'away' perpetuate the idea that space and culture are bounded within firm boundaries and traditions, and it has been suggested to abandon ideas of localised cultures (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). Atkinson et al. (2001) argue that one does not need to travel a great distance to encounter social or cultural difference. This methodological dilemma of 'home' and 'away' is well established in anthropological literature. Contemporary anthropologists recognise that fieldwork entails both the familiar and the unfamiliar (Madden, 2010), and that knowledge of or belonging to 'a culture' does not automatically concede researchers' incorporation within this culture (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). When white, educated Philippe Bourgois works around the crack-infested neighbourhood of El Barrio in New York where he lives, chatting to his drug dealer and addict informants and friends, he is both at home and away (Bourgois, 2002). Being a resident in El Barrio grants him the status of resident and member of the community, but his background and socio-cultural status remove him from 'complete' membership. Therefore, it is not only a question of geography or culture, but of the positionality of the researcher within the field. In a sense, I had very much the same experience as Bourgois, although the migrants I spoke with were of various socio-cultural and ethnic background. Some had different socio-economic and cultural situations and an entirely different outlook on life and migration to mine, and they did not seem close to me or my experience, while others did. As a migrant to Iceland myself, and living in the north of the country, the localities and contexts in which the research took place were both well-known and unfamiliar to me (Murray & Overton, 2014). As a migrant researcher, my positionality is complex and often dual. Having lived in Iceland for several years has provided me with a nuanced understanding of the society I reside in, and the challenges that other migrants may encounter. My own migrant status may have shaped my understanding of other migrants' experiences, potentially leading to a more empathic and culturally informed research process. Nevertheless, while providing me with valuable insights, my dual positionality also led to challenges. A lack of familiarity with certain socio-cultural aspects of my participants' lives may have limited my awareness of certain issues. This complex positionality may have influenced the choice of research questions, methodology, or analysis, requiring careful consideration of both my 'insider' and 'outsider' perspectives. To address this positionality in the research, I have engaged in

self-reflection throughout the entire research process to critically examine my own perspectives and biases. For example, during fieldwork, I found myself naturally gravitating towards participants with whom I shared similar experiences. I may have unintentionally framed my research questions to mirror aspects of my own challenges and experiences. Acknowledging the potential impact on the research, I have consciously refrained from steering participants toward specific aspects of their experience, making every effort to respect their autonomy in guiding the discussion. This approach aims to mitigate the influence of my own biases and ensures a more participant-driven exploration of their diverse perspectives.

Whether 'at home' or 'away', fieldwork encompasses a series of undertakings which may grant the researcher varying degrees of access into a particular 'field', be it a group, a place, a culture or a subculture. In that sense, the field is constructed through the long-term and thorough immersion of the researcher (Amit, 1999). The anthropological tradition of fieldwork insists on the physical presence of the researcher in a 'location', and on the sustenance of personal relationships which will serve to inform the research (*ibid.*). However, both aspects of traditional ethnography have been challenged by contemporary anthropological endeavours. Ethnography today does not necessarily rely on the physical presence of the researcher in a geographically and culturally distant community. The development of information and communication technologies and the recent COVID-19 pandemic have called for alternative ethnographic strategies, most notably digital ethnography (Chan et al., 2020).

3.3 Understanding the field

The field is not necessarily a static, localised site and it can be entangled in circulating, fluid movements or spaces. Arguing for a decentralisation of the notion of field, Gupta and Ferguson (1997, p. 111) envisioned it as a personalised space, "a place where intellectual interests, personal predilections, and career outcomes can most happily intersect". The field can no longer be solely understood through a geographical "sense of location" but has to pay attention to the project's own "logic" and "political practice" (*ibid.,* p. 136). In this research, the field is constituted and always being restructured according to the participants and their perspectives, entanglements, and changing situations. It is not solely a space or a location, but an embodiment of the participants and researcher's perspective. I have adapted ethnography to the needs of my research. In this context, the field can be understood as an encounter with specific socio-cultural logics, and fieldwork as an attempt to situate knowledge within a particular context. The current debates within anthropology in late 20th century about field research and the relevance of strategies which go beyond the local or beyond the physical encounter are representative of an era calling for an increased focus on fluidity, movements, and connections. Qualitative methods, interviews and informal conversations are well suited to encapsulate these entanglements.

In this re-evaluation about what constitutes a field, these anthropologists do not mean to erase the relevance of place altogether, but call for a sensitivity within particular research practices that goes beyond locality and examines "epistemological and political issues of location" (*ibid.*: 136), the "positioning process" of the researcher (Kalir, 2006, p. 237), and the transformation of "empty and absolute space into meaningful place" (Coleman & Collins, 2006, p. 3). The field is no longer necessarily about being 'here' or being 'there', but about "constituting the very 'cultural processes', 'connections' and 'associations' that anthropologists follow to define their fields" (Craith & Hill, 2015, p. 46). This is important for this study because the field is not constituted only by sharing a geographical location, but by sharing the experience of distance and absence. Migrant parents in the study have all had to negotiate family separation, whether it is from their own children or from their extended family. Several anthropologists and social scientists have adjusted their understanding of the field and in seeking to respond to the different demands of their research have sought to implement "various forms of strategic *dislocation* [which] permeate [their] contributions" (Coleman & Collins, 2006: 3). To put it more simply, using experimental approaches to 'the field' has allowed us to think beyond 'traditional' ways of *doing* anthropology and to think about the means through which we ground our knowledge. As the most distinctive practice in anthropology, fieldwork can be understood as a variable set of observational and collection practices which are meant to increase understanding of a theme, a group, or a phenomenon.

Fundamentally, the choice to conduct research in Akureyri in Northern Iceland for my doctoral study was a pragmatic one. I was already conducting research with migrants in this area, and I had a good network of individuals willing to help me with this PhD project. For this research, 'fieldwork' was entangled with my professional and personal life. Many events I attended provided me with the opportunity to indulge in participant observation. I had many informal conversations with friends and acquaintances that contributed to my fieldnotes and added context to the research. My position as a migrant parent and as a researcher provided me with special access to informants and informal conversations. That said, gaining access and finding people who were willing to be interviewed was not particularly easy, and I discuss data collection concerns after laying out the method of interviewing.

3.4 Interviews as a mode of inquiry

Several researchers understand methodology as a set of strategies and tactics (Kalir, 2006). The methods employed to undertake anthropological research are never set into a very strict frame that every researcher follows without question. Methods are personal choices which respond to a specific research project. In social research, complex questions lend themselves to qualitative exploration (Brett Davies, 2007) and interviews are used as a mean to get information (Esterberg, 2002). Interviews are often used in ethnography to hear about the participants' social reality in their own words.

Ethnographic interviews are understood as participant listening and require the engagement and commitment of the researcher to truly listen (Forsey, 2010). The ethnographic interview allows for participants to share their experiences using nuances and detail that can encompass the complexities of human experience.

Seen as 'learning through conversation' (Crang & Cook, 2007, p.35), choosing interviews as the main method to conduct this research was important to allow for the emergence of the feelings, ideas and experiences of the participants. Esterberg (2002) questions the mechanical aspect of interviewing where the researcher is 'trained to extract information in an efficient, detached yet pleasant manner' (p.90) and trying 'to avoid bias [by revealing] as little about him -or herself as possible'. Rather than understanding interviewing as an unequal relationship in which one person is staying silent and asking questions and the other one sharing and talking endlessly, she thinks that interviews should be based upon the personal relationship between researcher and interviewee. This viewpoint lends itself to the discussion being more organic and more egalitarian, and therefore more open and honest. It also allows the interviewees to feel they may have commonalities or shared experiences with the researcher and feel more comfortable talking about difficult or intimate issues. Maintaining emotional distance is difficult and sometimes impossible because of the rapport established between researcher and interviewee. In ethnographic practice, the quality of the relationship and the ease of the participant are often more important than getting to ask the 'right' questions or all the themes on the researcher's list. Esterberg (2002) and others encourage the primacy of the good relationship between researcher and interviewee rather than 'goal-oriented' strict interviewing which may lead to a strained or unequal relationship between the two individuals.

Ethnographers have often been concerned about the bias that can come with establishing a strong rapport with the interviewee or exploring issues that are familiar to the researcher (Brett Davies, 2007). The uneasiness about the latter stems from the fear that familiarity may increase the number of preconceived ideas and assumptions the researcher has about a particular topic. On the other end, being familiar with a said topic allow researcher and interviewee to build rapport and trust with the participants. Planning the choice of location is also an important factor to establish a good relationship. I often aim to seem both professional and friendly and try to put my participants at ease and let them make some of the decisions about the interviews, including where to meet. This research happened in two stages. The first stage involved conducting interviews with migrant parents about their daily life in Iceland with a special focus on well-being, parenting and education, and gender. The second stage focused on conducting interviews with transnational parents who either currently live apart from their children or have in the past. Throughout both stages, the primary focus remained on delving into the daily lives of the participants, understanding the challenges they face, as well as the moments of joy they experience. For both stages, the participants in this research were approached through personal contacts, word-of-

mouth, and social media on a few occasions. They had to consider themselves transnational or migrant parents to take part and willing to discuss their experiences. The participants were informed about the research through a letter of intent, provided with informed consent and given some time to decide whether they wanted to participate. I informed them of the purpose of the research for both stages of the project. Overall, the purpose was to understand the experiences of migrant and transnational parents in Iceland, and to recognise how the lives of transnational families in Iceland could be improved. When they agreed to participate, we agreed on a date and place to meet. The choice of where to meet was left to the informant and most chose to meet in public places such as a café or the library. In the meantime, a template for semi-structured interviews for each stage of the research was compiled. Both templates had overlapping questions and themes to explore. Ethnographic research will often prefer semi-structured or unstructured interview techniques to alleviate the potential pressures on the participants (and on the researcher). Semi-structured interviews facilitate the introduction of issues naturally in the flow of the conversation and encourage elaboration (Brett Davies, 2007). Although I had an overall frame for my research and interviews, I often had conversations with the participants in which they choose and lead the themes they wanted to explore, what Donna Haraway calls "polite inquiry" (Haraway, 2016). There is a consensus in ethnography that giving participants the freedom to lead the conversation where they want to rather than to confine their thoughts into a strict framework is a sensible way of doing research. This allows participants to discuss the topics, meanings and practices which are important to them rather than to the ethnographer, and reinforces the reflexivity of the research by mitigating my own potential biases.

Upon meeting participants, I explained that the purpose of the research was to learn more about the experiences of transnational and migrant parents living in Iceland and to understand what was conducive to (un)happiness in their lives. I generally opened the interview with the question 'Do you want to tell me why you are in Iceland?' which was a nice icebreaker and allowed the participants to start with a subject that they were happy to discuss about their lives. In the interviews the participants were asked about employment, family life, children, school and parenting, citizenship, language, acceptance and discrimination, travels and visit to the home country, communication with family and friends abroad, friendships and support networks, the images or perceptions participants had of Iceland before they moved, joys and pains of daily life in Iceland, the participants' emotions towards their home country and Iceland, living in Northern Iceland (when relevant) and the future. As these were semi-structured interviews the interview template was used quite loosely as I made sure to prioritise the comfort of the participants over the format of the interview. This was done to ensure that the experience was pleasant and safe for the participants. Thus, I often let them lead the conversation where they wanted to, although I always kept in mind the broad themes I wanted to discuss with them. If the participants seemed passionate about one

topic and were brief on another, I tried to prompt the participants towards the questions of my interview frame when given the opportunity. However, it was not always possible, and I adapted the conversations depending on the participants' willingness and enthusiasm for discussing particular topics. I often refer to the interviews as 'conversations' to illustrate that the exchanges between the participants and myself that took place during this project were approached in a friendly, open and compassionate manner, and resemble conversations you have with friends in similar settings. On two occasions, the friendly conversations I expected were a bit more difficult to navigate. One of the participants was involved in a difficult custody battle with his ex-partner and was trying to advocate his 'case' as if I was a judge during the custody. The other one would not discuss why he was in Iceland. Consequently, neither conversation was very open and honest. The rest of the time, the interviews went perfectly well and remained cordial and professional. Although there is no rigid ethnographic expectation dictating that interviews must 'go well' or remain 'cordial', scholarship emphasises the importance of establishing a rapport with participants. This emphasis is rooted in the understanding that a positive and respectful relationship between the researcher and participants fosters trust, encourages open communication, and enhances the quality of data collected during the interview process (Brett Davies, 2007; Crang & Cook, 2007).

The interviews were conducted in the winter of 2014 to the winter of 2018. They lasted between one and one and a half hours. The interviews were voluntary and anonymous and were recorded with explicit permission from the participants. Willing participants were invited for a second interview, and six individuals were interviewed twice. Serial interviews can be used to give the researcher the time and opportunity to reflect over concepts and conversations, and to gain information over time to reflect on the change (Crang & Cook, 2007). The interviews were conducted in the language that the participant felt most comfortable with; most participants chose the interviews to be conducted in English (23), Icelandic (5) or other languages (5). I relied on an interpreter on two occasions, for translation and transcription, as I did not speak the language participants wished to use. The dependency of using an interpreter posed a few challenges. I met the interpreter beforehand to discuss ethical considerations regarding confidentiality, informed consent, and the interpreter's role as a neutral person in the research process. To reduce and avoid inaccuracies and miscommunication which could impact the data, I carefully chose an interpreter who was a native speaker of the participants' language and who also had excellent English proficiency. On these occasions, the interpreter also transcribed and translated the interviews to English. After transcription and translation, I requested clarifications from the interpreter on certain expressions to ensure that the participants' voice and intended meanings were accurately conveyed in English. On all other occasions, I conducted and transcribed the interviews myself, whether it was in Icelandic or English. Audio-recording the interviews allows the researcher to focus entirely on what the participants are saying, and to have an accurate transcription to work on during data

analysis (Brett Davies, 2007). The recordings are useful to pick up on cues during the transcription that I may have failed to pick up on during the interview, and therefore facilitates analysis. I used fieldnotes, recorded immediately after each interview, to reflect on non-verbal communication and some other details about the interviews. These fieldnotes provided additional context but were not incorporated into the data analysis.

Shortly after the interviews, I transcribed the interviews accurately, although on occasion I slightly edited the text to ease comprehension. The edited text appears clearly in the transcription. In the text, I use pseudonyms to maintain the confidentiality of the participants.

After transcription, I started to analyse the data manually before moving on to use the software Nvivo12, which allowed for a simpler organisation of themes. The analysis followed the principles of thematic analysis. I used Roulston's (2014) analytical questions to help with initial coding and "[elicit] meaning from text" (Roulston, 2014, p. 36). These questions served as prompts to guide me through the data and helped the identification of themes and the generation of ideas (*ibid.)*. Coding was used to condense the data and to interpret it. Through coding and data reduction, themes began to emerge from the participants' narratives. Coding patterns were both found and deliberately sought to find 'repetitive patterns of actions and consistencies in human affairs as documented in the data' (Saldana, 2001; p. 5). Codes were then connected to form other codes, categories, and overarching themes. The analysis was the same for all stages of the research since the multiple research projects that form this thesis have similar research questions and objectives. The data revealed overlapping themes that provided a deeper and more holistic understanding of migrant and transnational parents' lives. The themes elicited through coding, and particularly those connected to emotions, served as a basis for the chapters of this thesis.

3.5 The participants

Researching migration is not straightforward as migrants are culturally or geographically a diverse group. In this study, I did not engage with migrants from a particular region of the world or nationality but with migrants of various backgrounds who had either had the experience of living away from their children or who were living with their children but away from other family members. Initially, the study was to engage only with transnational parents who lived in Iceland while their children lived abroad with relatives or their other parent. Gaining access to participants who had children living abroad was challenging. Family reunification is an important propeller for migration to Iceland (Skaptadóttir, 2010). Most migrants who decide to come without their children do it for short periods of time until they can apply for family reunification. Therefore, transnational parents in Iceland are unlikely to be numerous, and their parental status is often imperceptible, making their identification complicated. The first few interviews with transnational parents were arranged through personal

contacts and word-of-mouth. After each interview, I asked the participants to identify other transnational parents that would be willing to speak to me. Two participants were identified using social media. After struggling to gain access to such individuals because of their lack of visibility and because this situation seems rare in Iceland, I took the decision to enlarge the study and to include parents who had their children with them in Iceland but were part of larger transnational families.

Before focusing on transnational parents, I had conducted other interviews with migrant parents as part of various research projects. These projects overlapped with the themes of this study, and it was decided by the doctoral committee and me that they could be incorporated to provide better understanding of the topic of this thesis. 22 participants were interviewed for projects on well-being in Northern Iceland, parenting, education and gender. 11 participants were interviewed specifically for this PhD research. Overall, six participants were interviewed twice. In the discussion in this thesis, I refer to 'transnational parents' when I speak about foreign parents who live in Iceland without their children, and to 'migrant parents' when I talk about foreign parents living in Iceland with their children. The number of transnational parents is 12, and the number of migrant parents' participants is 21. I conducted 38 interviews with 33 individuals for this PhD project. All the participants except for five (28) live in a semi-urban location in Northern Iceland. The remaining five live in the Reykjavík area and were interviewed via Skype. 17 participants were men, and 16 were women.

The participants were of different backgrounds in terms of education, work situation, length of time in Iceland and ages. The majority of the participants had university education (21) and the others completed vocational training or had a trade (12). Eight participants were not employed, eight worked in jobs below their qualifications such as a master's degree holder working as a cleaner, and 17 held employment in their field. They had been in Iceland from a few months to several decades, and their age ranged from mid-thirties to mid-fifties.

Of these 33 individuals, almost a third (10) experienced separation from their children for extended periods of time; eight of them were men, and two were women. Four of these 10 individuals had since been reunited with their children and were recollecting their past experiences. Four of these 10 individuals had been born and raised outside Europe, and the remaining were all from Europe. The other 21 participants arrived in Iceland with their children or had their children in Iceland but had other family members such as parents or siblings in the country of origin.

Of these 33 individuals, two women had experienced separation from their partner and stayed with their children while waiting for their spouse to join them in Iceland. They recollected both their experience as temporary single mothers and the experience of their partners who were away from their families. The remaining 21 individuals were migrant parents living in Iceland with their children. Nine of these individuals were men, and 12 were women. All but four of them (16) were from various countries in

Europe. To provide more context, Europe in this research is divided into several sub-regions to describe the participants' home countries: Northern Europe, comprising of the Nordic and the Baltic countries; Western Europe, bordered in the West by France and in the East by Germany and Austria; Southern Europe, comprising of Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece; and Central and Eastern Europe, bordered by Poland and Czech Republic in the West and by Belarus, Romania, Ukraine and Bulgaria in the West. Over half of the participants (20 out of 33) are or were in a relationship with an Icelandic partner, and the others (13) are or were in a relationship with a partner from their home countries.

Table 1 Overview of participants. *Transnational parents are marked by a black star ★. Migrant parents who experienced 'solo parenting' in Iceland while their partner lived abroad, or vice-versa, are indicated with a purple star ★. The others are migrant parents.*

Pseudonym and age	Gender	Home country /region	In Iceland since...	Paid occupation /Sector	Place of residence	Interview number
Roman, 34	M	Central and Eastern Europe	2008	Hospitality	Northern Iceland	1, 21
Dario, 35	M	Central and Eastern Europe	2011	Not employed	Northern Iceland	2
Louisa, 33	F	Western Europe	1995	Not employed	Northern Iceland	3
Alina, 30	F	Central and Eastern Europe	2009	Care	Northern Iceland	4, 25
Klara, 27	F	Central and Eastern Europe	2009	Hospitality	Northern Iceland	5
Yan, 37	M	Central and Eastern Europe	1995	Hospitality	Northern Iceland	6
Andres, 32	M	Southern Europe	2008	Cultural	Northern Iceland	7
Tomas, 40	M	Western Europe	2001	Education	Northern Iceland	8
Celena, 36	F	Outside Europe	2011	Not employed	Northern Iceland	9, 15
Aisha, 34	F	Outside Europe	2008	Not employed	Northern Iceland	10
Nina, 40	F	Western Europe	2005	Civil	Northern Iceland	11

Gabriel, 54	M	Outside Europe	1990	Education	Northern Iceland	12
Maja, 35	F	Central and Eastern Europe	2006	Hospitality	Northern Iceland	13, 26
Sven, 52 ★	M	Northern Europe	2007	Not employed	Northern Iceland	14
Kanya, 29	F	Outside Europe	2006	Factory worker	Northern Iceland	16
Alma, 65	F	Northern Europe	1973	Retired	Northern Iceland	17
Jan, 58	M	Western Europe	1991	Education	Northern Iceland	18
Josef, 59	M	Central and Eastern Europe	1983	Education	Northern Iceland	19
Piotr, 37	M	Central and Eastern Europe	2012	Education	Northern Iceland	20
Elina, 35	F	Central and Eastern Europe	2013	Not employed	Northern Iceland	22
Jona, 36	F	Central and Eastern Europe	2006	Care	Northern Iceland	23
Emilia, 33	F	Central and Eastern Europe	2010	Hospitality	Northern Iceland	24
Tatiana, 40 ★	F	Central and Eastern Europe	2008	Education	Northern Iceland	27
Miguel, 34 ★	M	Outside Europe	2009	Factory worker	Northern Iceland	28, 32

Martin, 38 ★	M	Central and Eastern Europe	2016	Construction	Northern Iceland	29
Viktor, 40 ★	M	Central and Eastern Europe	2016	Construction	Northern Iceland	30
Abel, 38 ★	M	Western Europe	2017	Hospitality	Northern Iceland	31
Nadia, 39 ★	F	Outside Europe	2016	Not employed	Northern Iceland	33
Caleb, 42 ★	M	Outside Europe	1994	IT	Reykjavík	34
Ciara, 34★	F	Southern Europe	2016	Hospitality	Reykjavík	35,38
Hannah, 37 ★	F	Outside Europe	2010	Self-employed	Reykjavík	36
Ivan, 34 ★	M	Central and Eastern Europe	2015	Construction	Reykjavík	37
Ciara, 34★ & Jamar, 38 ★	F & M	Southern Europe & Outside Europe	2016/2018	Hospitality & not employed	Reykjavík	[35 with Ciara only], 38

3.6 Ethical concerns

I followed the ethical practice of researchers in anthropology and adhered to the standard practices of ethical research such as:

> "respect for participants, informed consent, specific permission required for audio or video recording, voluntary participation and no coercion, participant right to withdraw, full disclosure of funding sources, no harm to participants, avoidance of undue intrusion, no use of deception, the presumption and preservation of anonymity, participant right to check and modify a transcript, confidentiality of personal matters, data protection, enabling participation, ethical governance, provision of grievance procedures, appropriateness of research methodology, and full reporting of methods" (Vanclay et al., 2013, p. 243).

Participation in this research was entirely voluntary. Although it required a certain level of commitment and time from the participants, they took part for as much and as long as they wished to and could decide to withdraw their participation at any given time. This was explained through a detailed informed consent letter, and the participants took their time to decide whether they wanted to take part. Interviewees were invited for a second interviews a few months after the first one, and six individuals agreed to be interviewed again.

The complex and asymmetrical power dynamics that can occur during research were recognised. However, many of the participants were white, educated and middle class, which often put myself, the researcher, and the participant, on an equal footing. When I felt that my participants were not as privileged as I was, I made sure to be especially reverent to show that their voice was valued and respected. I made sure to comply with ethical and institutional requirements and submitted an application to Research Ethics Committee for Public Higher Education Institutions. Some of the themes explored during the research could be intense and family separation, parental guilt and care provision was discussed sensibly and with caution. Throughout the research process, I ensured that participation in this research would not cause any harm to the participants by being a good listener and a respectful interviewer. I never pushed any of the participant to answer a question, followed their cues and made sure to raise adequate topics only.

The data collected consists of fieldnotes and transcripts of interviews. These were produced by semi-structured interviews with migrant parents in Iceland. The interviews were audio-recorded, and permission was sought before each interview. Participant confidentiality was guaranteed, and their anonymity preserved by utilising pseudonyms for their names and other information that could have been used to trace them (e.g., place of residence was changed with the use of a pseudonym or a neutral description; for example, from naming the name of a village to "a village in Northern Iceland"). Confidentiality and anonymity in small settings are always difficult in an ethnography. The reader needs to have enough context about the participant to understand the underlying issues. However, some of that context needs to remain vague not to break anonymity. Throughout this work, I rarely specify the country of origin of my participants, since it would be too easy to identify them if I did so. For example, there are 415 Polish individuals living in Akureyri in 2022 but only 10 from Somalia, which makes it practically impossible to mention the latter's country of origin without breaking anonymity. In some cases, even specifying that the participant is Polish can be problematic. Saying that X is from Poland and works at university, or in a restaurant, is almost guaranteed to break anonymity. Therefore, I try to give out as much detail as I can without risking breaching anonymity and confidentiality, and always prioritise the latter.

The data from the interviews was stored offline, on a personal computer which is password protected. The research does not deal with sensitive or illegal activities. However, some of the interview topics were deeply personal and intimate. Sometimes, participants expressed discomfort at sharing their life stories, but I mitigated that risk by being very flexible with the interview frame. The data collected was used to explore the various themes of this thesis. Some of the main themes that were discussed in interviews were concerned with distance and absence, co-presence, maintaining connections, the negotiation of parenting in hybrid cultures, happiness and needs, and life In Iceland. We now set out to explore migration decision-making which led the participants to move to Iceland and the influence of this choice on their experiences and well-being.

4 Geographical imaginations and mobility

Geographical imaginations consist of the images we hold of different places, be it landscape, people, or cultural characteristics. These images are often over-simplified, but they do impact our experiences of particular places and our life choices, including where to go on holidays or where to migrate (Thompson, 2017). Geographical imaginations have consequences for the cultural construction of nations (Ísleifsson, 2011). Increased migration to Iceland raises questions about Icelandic self-perception, and it is important to understand why migrant and transnational parents decide to migrate to Iceland, as well as the way migrants perceive their country of destination before and upon arrival. It can provide us with a better understanding of individuals and families' expectations of life in a new country and their choices, even if they frame their migration decision as incidental. Moreover, I show how geographical imaginations influence the perceptions of life in Iceland, and the ways in which migrant parents incorporate images and discourses about the exotic North in their own narratives and experiences. I begin the chapter with a long excerpt from an interview with a migrant who arrived in Iceland as a young adult with his mother. His first impressions and experiences in the country encapsulate many of the feelings that migrants come across upon arrival: uncertainty, disorientation, and fear. I then move on to discuss migration decision-making; if most migrant parents I spoke with claim to have moved for reasons which are not primarily financial, most of them make mention of 'work' or 'opportunity' to explain their move to Iceland. Later, I discuss how geographical imaginations of Iceland and the North can encourage mobility in this part of the world, and how it may have shaped the participants' narratives and expectations of Iceland as an exceptional space. In this chapter, the concept of geographical imagination is used to discuss how imaginaries inform both the migration decision and the expectations of migrants in Iceland.

*

> I remember the day I arrived like it was yesterday. We landed in Keflavík and it was raining and cold. In the evening we got to Reykjavík, were we stayed with an Icelandic doctor who had been studying in Moscow, and she could speak Russian. We stayed at her house and the next day we took a plane from Reykjavík to Akureyri; I know that now, but at the time my mother hadn't told me the name of the place we were moving to. When I saw Eyjafjörður from the window, I thought the town looked good, it was big and nice. I remember seeing the mountains on the other side of the fjord, right before we landed, and wondering what lay behind. That's

> when we took a smaller plane, an 8-seater from Akureyri to Svartfjörð. When I saw Svartfjörð it was dim, a dark black, and there were only a few lights. This is when I told my mother I wanted to go home. Really. I said, Mom, I want to go home, I don't want to be here.
>
> When I arrived in Iceland I didn't have any money. I arrived with one pair of trousers, a t-shirt, a jacket and some shoes, and that was it. I didn't come with anything else. I started with nothing. Zero. I didn't have anything, no money to buy cigarettes. I couldn't smoke for a month, until I got my first wage, but my mom wasn't happy I bought cigarettes again, so I stopped smoking after two or three years.
>
> Life in Svartfjörð was hard. [At work] I didn't know what people were saying, didn't understand anything. When I went for coffee break, Icelanders around me were talking and talking. All I could hear was 'blah, blah, blah', and I thought maybe they were talking about me, and I was scared. Four years in a fish factory. It was hard. It was fun. There were people from Poland, France, Yugoslavia, the Faroe Islands, good people see. It was like a family. Most Icelanders at the factory were friendly, showing you things and teaching you Icelandic, you know showing you the ropes, and the manager was a good man. A very good man.
>
> After four years at the factory, something happened. One of the managers was on to me. He bossed me around and one day he asked me to do something that I couldn't do. It was beyond my skills, and security-wise, it was dangerous, I could fall and die. He said I had to do it or I would be fired. I said 'Fine, fire me', and he did. I went to the workers' union because dismissing me like that was illegal, and the union had a dispute with the employer, and at the end, he had to compensate me. I stopped working straight away. I decided to stand up for myself and move on. To change something in my life.
>
> I am more of an Icelander than anything else now, I think. Why am I saying this? Because when I go on holidays, in my home country, after three weeks there's only one thing I want. Do you know what it is? To come here again. (Interview 6, Male, Central and Eastern Europe)

*

Placed at the margin of Europe, Iceland remains rather inconspicuous in the public imagination of most Europeans. Hence many of the participants in this study only had a vague idea about the destination they were headed to when they moved, as exemplified by the participant above. However, recently, the country received a lot of publicity

when international media covered at length the turmoil taking place in Iceland during the economic crisis of 2008 (Chartier, 2010) and then again after the volcanic eruption of Eyjafjallajökull in 2010, which caused major disruption to air travel across Europe (Benediktsson et al., 2018). Despite the potent impact of the economic crisis on Iceland's international image, the country managed to recover from being perceived as bankrupt, corrupt and broken to being increasingly recognised as an example of advanced democracy and successful resistance to neoliberal dominance (Birrell, 2015; Loftsdóttir, 2017; Worstall, 2015).

Iceland is also evoked as a feminist paradise (Heertz, 2016) and as one of the happiest countries on earth (Madden, 2019) and one of the safest places to live (Global Peace Index, 2019). Significantly, the zealous promotion of Iceland as a tourist destination, initiated to help it recover from the economic recession, has clearly contributed to the production of the country's image as a manifestation of the exotic "Arctic North" (Lund et al., 2016). While it indisputably resulted in the rapid expansion of the tourism industry, the campaign inspired substantial migration, including tourism-related labour mobility. Although it is difficult to deduce that mass marketing of the 'North' has influenced migrant and transnational parents' decision to move to Iceland, their narratives do mirror many of the ideas which have been projected for tourism purposes. This will be discussed here and in chapter 8 about gender roles. I explore the reasons given by migrants for moving to Iceland, before establishing how migrant and transnational parents have formed more-or-less ideal images of Iceland as an exceptional space for themselves and their families.

4.1 The migration decision: unintended, uninformed, unimagined?

In the past, international migration was often explained in terms of economic necessity or economic pull factors (Hagen-Zanker, 2008). However, the motivations to migrate are complex and numerous, as demonstrated by international literature on the topic (de Haas, 2021) showing that decision to migrate generally intersects with a variety of economic, social and political motives. Scholars have increasingly been examining these various reasons of people's movement across the world (Sirkeci & Cohen, 2011; Thompson, 2017). Sirkeci and Cohen (2011) indicate that imputing migration as a purely economic choice does not reflect the complexity of migration decision-making. Thompson (2017) reasons that scrutinising geographical imaginations is a reasonable approach to understand how culture and sense of place may be one determinant of migration decision-making.

Many of the participants in this study emphasised in the interviews and informal conversations that they did not come to Iceland purely because of economic necessity, and they generally rejected the "labour migrant" label. It was important for them to create a clear distinction between "labour migrants" and themselves, possibly because

most participants in this research belonged to the middle class. This inclination to differentiate between types of migrants stems from the racialisation of certain groups of migrants in Iceland – in particular those from the former countries of the Soviet Union and other Central and Eastern European countries, which have been constructed as distant Others in the Icelandic and European imaginaries (Loftsdóttir, 2017). More broadly, the negative portrayal of Polish and Lithuanian migrants as "cheap disposable work" (*ibid*., p.70) and as criminals has conferred on migrants from Central and Eastern Europe a disadvantaged status in the hierarchies of migrants in Iceland (*ibid*.). In my study, many participants from Central and Eastern European countries thus attempted to disentangle themselves from this unfavourable narrative by emphasising the distinctiveness of their *choice* to migrate, as exemplified by one of the participants in my study describing her feelings when she travels from Iceland to visit her home country:

> I already feel bad when I'm going to the plane. Just… see, tired people who work here in Iceland and who are going home, I'm just so sorry for them. Because they have to work abroad, they cannot just live with their families. […] I didn't come here for work; I had a good education and good work […] I could be there [in Eastern Europe], but it was other reasons [that made me move to Iceland]. (Interview 27, Female, Central and Eastern Europe)

Stories such as hers describe a division between labour migration and other forms of mobility, as the labour migrant in Iceland has come to be associated with otherness – increasingly so after the economic crisis of 2008, with the growth of negative portrayals of migrant workers in the media (Skaptadóttir, 2015) coinciding with emerging narratives and representations of Icelandicness which also maintains the migrants' position as outsiders (Loftsdóttir, 2017). Labour migration is intertwined with ideas of race and class, and not wanting to identify as a labour migrant is a strategic deployment of qualities denying any affiliation with "them", the foreign workers who fall into the stereotype of the uneducated and/or poor migrant. The short film "Stanislaw" (Gunnarssón, 2010) encapsulates with brilliance an Icelandic society ridden with stereotypes, when an Icelandic mother exclaims she knows "a woman from Thailand who is a doctor!"[3], thus depicting how racism and the hierarchisation of migrants in Iceland may be conceived.

Very few of the participants in this study aspired to move to Iceland. Over half of the participants (18 out of 33) claim to have settled in Iceland after pursuing a romantic relationship with a partner. Of those, 11 followed an Icelandic partner that they met abroad, and six moved with a partner who had the same nationality as them and who

[3] My translation. Original sentence is "Ég veit um tælenska konu sem er læknir".

was working or going to work in Iceland. One individual followed a partner already living in Iceland. Of the 13 individuals who cited work as their main reason for migrating to Iceland, six found an Icelandic partner and formed a family together with them after moving to Iceland. My analysis of the narratives from the participants shows a manifest a lack of intention for moving to Iceland. Instead, many of them were 'invited' to Iceland by a friend or a relative who offered to help them find work, or they 'randomly' sent out job applications and secured employment. The latter either sent applications to jobs across Europe that seemed to fit their specific skills, or registered on websites that allow prospective applicants to upload their resume and to be contacted by employers in every European country.

Even the individuals who actively pursued employment specifically in Iceland framed their arrival and the basis of their decision to migrate as fortuitous. They insisted on the incidental character of their migration, which they talked about as the result of luck and coincidence rather than careful planning. This distinction does not only pertain to the Central and Eastern European migrants of this study but to virtually all my participants and may be explained as another attempt to disassociate oneself not only with the labour migrant label, but with the negative association that may come with the admission of escaping undesirable conditions in one's home country. While some individuals I spoke with for this study felt comfortable saying that they had moved to Iceland in search of a 'better life', implying that financial reasons played a part in their decision, others were more reticent. The decision to migrate inevitably raises questions about the participants class position, their education or their status. Individuals who explain that their choice was independent of their financial or employment situation insist on the 'good jobs' and good situations they had in their home countries. Most discussions reveal that moving to Iceland is framed as incidental or unintended, as exemplified by the following excerpts from interviews.

One man in his mid-forties and a father of one daughter, who had been living in Iceland for less than a year and working as a machine operator explains why he came to Iceland:

> I just left information on the internet that I'm looking for a job in my profession. It was completely a surprise for me… Someone just called and offer me work in Iceland. [It was] never the plan to come here, you know, I actually had to check on the map where [was] Iceland. (Male, Interview 30, Central and Eastern Europe)

By leaving his resume on a European recruitment website, this man was ready to find an opportunity abroad, but had not considered Iceland as a possible destination. His teenage daughter lives with her mother in a country neighbouring his country of origin, in Western Europe. Another man, Roman, who has been living in Iceland for a decade and currently studying, reminisces about his decision to come to Iceland:

> My brother [...] just found me a job. I was just finishing secondary school, and I had a choice: either go to the army or go to Iceland, so I decided to go to Iceland. I did not want to go to the army. The troops that I was supposed to be sent to were going to be sent to Iraq or Afghanistan, so... I didn't think it was a great idea. (Interview 1, Male, Central and Eastern Europe)

Roman chose to escape a situation which he deemed undesirable (going to the army) by accepting a job and joining his brother in Iceland. He then met an Icelandic partner and decided to stay to have a family in Iceland. The next participant, Klara, is from Central Europe and had envisioned her stay in Iceland to be short-term. She describes how she had thought about coming to work for a few months before going back to her home country:

> I came to Iceland five and a half years ago. I came with my friend to work in a hotel. [...] I was supposed to work for three months, and maybe half [a month more] and then back home, but it turned six months instead of three months, then I went home, and I came back really fast. I just loved it here. I got addicted to Iceland. [...] I came here to make some money, go back home and lead a good life but it just turned out differently. (Female, Interview 5, Northern Europe)

'It just turned out differently': Klara's initial reason for migrating seemed more a matter of circumstance than a considered choice, and seems to have demanded little if no personal determination. For those who said they moved to Iceland for work (13), the possibility to migrate was often initiated through personal connections, as more than half (8) were offered a job by a relative or a friend living in Iceland. Scholarship has shown that this is a common occurrence during migration (Massey & Zenteno, 1999; Thompson, 2017), as I discuss below. Those who had envisioned staying for only a few months have ended up extending their stays for many years, transforming the temporary stay into a permanent one. For others, love at first sight or a random event seem to have found their way arbitrarily into their lives, as illustrated by this example from a man who has been living in Iceland for four years and who said that he had a good situation in his country of origin before moving to Iceland:

> I knew nothing about Iceland. Well, we [my wife and I] were considering going for a [job] somewhere. Iceland is not a [career-oriented] country. When you think about a career you think about the UK, Germany, the US... not about Iceland. [...] I more or less ignored this email [I had received about a job there]. The deadline was December 6th or 7th, and I managed to forget about that. [...] I didn't have anything. I hadn't prepared anything [...] and I did a one-sentence application. [...] Everything in my life happens by chance. (Interview 20, Male, Central and Eastern Europe)

This quote gives one more example of the lack of anticipation and planning which was a running theme of these conversations. If the aspiration to migrate specifically to Iceland transpires in very few conversations, it is worth noting that it is not the first country of migration for a little less than a third of the participants (9). The literature on international migration reveals that one experience abroad often results in a tendency to migrate again (Massey & Zenteno, 1999). Moreover, more than half of the participants come from countries where aspirations to migrate are strong and cultures of migration have been identified such as the Philippines or Poland (Thompson, 2017). Some of them belong to families or to a social class where migration is expected or encouraged. As Thomson (2007, p 78) points out, a culture of migration is "a cumulative factor that produces migratory aspirations when there appear to be few tangible economic and/or social motivations, as the act of migration becomes a rite of passage and/or source of social capital". This concept suggests that in certain contexts, migration evolves beyond a response to economic or social needs, transforming into a deeply ingrained cultural phenomenon. The emergence of a culture of migration signifies that within specific countries, regions, or cities, the idea of migration becomes normalised and even anticipated in the local or national imaginary. Such is the case in certain countries such as the Philippines or Mexico, in specific regions or cities such as Dhaka in Bangladesh (*ibid.*) or in cosmopolitan elite families (Liu-Farrer, 2016; Lei, 2010). In these settings, migration is not solely driven by economic or social necessities but has evolved into a shared norm. The idea of migration is woven into the collective consciousness. Understanding cultures of migration is essential for comprehending why migration may be perceived as a routine part of life in certain communities, and how it may be shaping the aspirations and decisions of individuals and families over generations.

The idea of migration may originate from one's entourage or from a childhood imaginary, as illustrated by Martin, a participant from Poland. Although he had never imagined moving to Iceland, the desire for migration was prompted very early in his life by his father's 'missed' opportunity to leave and parcels sent by his uncle:

> I didn't really want to come here in Iceland, but the situation pushed me out. [...] During the martial law in Poland in 1981, when I was just two years old, [Father] had the opportunity to go to Canada [and get] political asylum. [...] They told him the only rule is that he cannot leave Canada for five years. And he was so scared to leave mom and us, he didn't go. [...] Then I decided, I thought to myself... If I was him, I would leave. I was about, I don't know, maybe six, seven years old. I had an uncle who went to Canada, [...] he sent us a package with all the goods that you would only get in special shops for dignitaries in Poland, during communist times. So I said there are a lot of goods up there and I want to reach for them. I said that when I was six, that I would go. (Male, Interview 29, Central and Eastern Europe)

Martin's longing for another place has been prompted by the lack of available goods in communist Poland and the promise and hope associated with the parcels sent by his uncle from abroad. Others who claim not to have imagined migration as a possibility came to Iceland to join someone offering them work, a sibling most often, or a close friend. Therefore, imaginaries can prompt migration aspirations, and the unintended narratives of most participants demonstrate that the incorporation in a culture of migration is spontaneous and often unconscious. In the context of network migration, job opportunities are presented within existing social circles, creating a pathway for individuals to follow the migration trend of their relatives or friends. While job opportunities may be available through connections, the decision to migrate is not necessarily a planned event, which could explain why most individuals discuss the migration decision as unintended and accidental.

The importance of kin and friendship in shaping and influencing migration, and the role of social networks in migration decision-making have been shown in various studies (Gurak, 1992; Haug, 2008; Koltai et al., 2020; Regmi et al., 2020). The contribution of social networks to creating geographical imaginations and to inspiring others to migrate constitutes an important component in migration. While these networks are dynamic and evolving rather than rigid and established, they serve a range of important functions such as providing assistance upon arrival in the new country, shaping the adaptation of new migrants, providing short-term practical support and maintaining contacts with their country of origin (*ibid.*). Several migrants in this study who were 'offered' a job in Iceland formulate it as a fortuitous and effortless affair; however, they had a strong support network upholding them and actively anticipating and securing their employment in the country, therefore reducing the costs and risks of moving.

If scholarship has devoted a lot of attention to understand why people migrate, there has been less of an attempt to decipher the reasons why migrants choose a particular destination over another -even if they declare that migration in a particular place just 'happened' to them. Thompson (2017) argues that cultures of migration cannot entirely explain people's choices to migrate. He encourages an exploration of "the impact of geographical imaginations on migration-decision making" (p.79) to account for the importance of place and to understand *why* people migrate *where*. The packages sent by Martin's uncle from North America created a specific desire for what was beyond communist Poland. Despite the apparently coincidental character of people's migration to Iceland, the narratives are embedded in geographical imaginations of a particular place, whether it is a country or a city.

Although social contacts may seem most influential in creating geographical imaginations (Thompson, 2017), Fujita (2004) argues that the consumption of Western popular culture has a powerful effect on how particular places are imagined. He argues that when individuals cannot imagine their future migration destination in detail, this is

because their exposure to images of this country has been far less than their exposure to other images and places, such as New York, and the United States generally. Chang and Lim (2004) contend that the marketing of particular places into tourist destinations also plays a part in creating geographical imaginations, and the development of Iceland as a tourist destination in recent years has certainly contributed to the production of an exotic "Arctic North" (Lund et al., 2016). As the distinction between various forms of mobility decreases (Skaptadóttir & Rancew-Sikora, 2016), the tourist and the migrant both become recipients of the images used to promote certain destinations.

4.2 Inspired by Iceland

The sharp rise in the number of migrants over the past few years, and their growing diversity in terms of origin, cannot only be perceived as a consequence of Iceland emerging as a legitimate actor in the global neoliberal economy (Loftsdóttir, 2014; Skaptadóttir, 2015), but should be also related to Iceland's increased visibility, as well as its extensive self-branding to energise the tourism industry. The country received much publicity when international media covered at length the turmoil taking place in Iceland during the economic crisis of 2008 (Chartier, 2010), as discussed in chapter two. International media coverage of the crisis was negative and sensationalised, and Iceland became a token of chaos in the financial world and beyond (*ibid.*).

Two years later, in March 2010, the volcanic eruption of Eyjafjallajökull made headlines around the world and caused major disruption to air travel across Europe (Benediktsson et al., 2018), resulting in the Icelandic Tourist Board and the Travel Industry Association expressing anxiety over the future of Iceland as a tourist destination (*ibid.*). In the space of two years, Iceland had become a symbol of disorder and uncertainty in international media. However, the actions of the government and a costly marketing campaign launched in 2010 were to turn around Iceland's damaged reputation on the world stage. Investing a total of 700 million ISK (3.7 million GBP), the campaign *Inspired by Iceland* frantically promoted the charms of the country via social media, invited foreign personalities to praise the value of Iceland (*ibid.*) and encouraged Icelanders to invite travellers into their homes and into their lives to experience "the real Iceland". The president of Iceland at the time, Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, invited foreign guests to enjoy "traditional Icelandic pancakes" at the presidential residence, while the mayor of Reykjavík, Jón Gnarr, asked travellers to join him at the historical house Höfði to share sushi (Inspired by Iceland, 2011). This large-scale campaign, alongside the marketing efforts of the national airline Icelandair (Lund et al., 2016), was a success, and helped mitigate the anxieties created by the economic crisis and the fear of "not being fully acknowledged as one of the powerful Western countries" (Loftsdóttir, 2014).

If the focus on tourism development is more acute during times of crisis (Jóhannesson & Huijbens, 2010), the hugely successful campaign "Inspired by Iceland", and its positive repercussions certainly provided a platform to reaffirm Iceland's position as

fully modern and neoliberal. Between 2010 and 2020, Icelandic global marketing contributed to the increased visibility of the country at the international level. Consequently, despite the unfavourable impact of the economic crisis on Iceland's international image, the country managed to recover from being perceived as bankrupt, corrupt and broken to an example for the world, the country that jailed its bankers (Birrell, 2015; Worstall 2015), "the best place in the world to be a woman" (Heertz, 2016), one of the happiest countries on earth (Madden, 2019) and one of the safest (Global Peace Index 2019). Iceland managed to carefully balance representations of Icelandicness to reinforce nation-building and to promote the country as egalitarian, feminist and peaceful along with images of pure nature and unique, authentic landscape.

Due to its relative proximity to the Arctic, Iceland exploits the image of the inhospitable North to exoticise the country as a tourist destination (Lund et al., 2016). Marketing campaigns capitalise on the rich juxtapositions available to a nation that is at once appealingly remote yet also offers all the commodities of a modern 'Western' nation (*ibid.*).

The positioning of Iceland as a remote, peripheral yet accessible region for global tourism has been at the core of the 'Inspired by Iceland' marketing campaign. Their poster 'Closer than you think' invokes the double play of distance and accessibility. As tourism has increased, several regions have started their own marketing campaigns to draw travellers to remote areas of the country. The campaign 'Visit Hauganes' is entirely built upon the idea of remoteness. This tiny village in Northern Iceland draws on its isolated location to create posts on social media such as 'a gem where time has stood still' or 'a village so quiet you can hear your inner voice'. Iceland's capital, Reykjavík, has been constructed as an Arctic tourism destination (Lund, et al., 2018), and intrepid travellers as well as rural Icelanders sometimes dismiss it as "anti-nature" (*ibid.*) and too urban to reflect the authentic 'Arctic North'. Tourism businesses and municipalities have integrated this idea into their efforts to attract travellers off the beaten track, and intertwine ideas about uniqueness, authenticity and rurality: "If you want to experience *unique* Iceland, go off season (Sept-May) to the *rural* areas" [my emphasis] (Visit Hauganes).

4.3 'A place beyond everything else': Migrants' narratives

Although most participants claimed that they had rather vague pictures of where they were headed as discussed above, some participants arrived in Iceland following certain ideas and images of Iceland. "A place beyond everything else" is how one informant described how he imagined Iceland before his migration, and it echoes a few others who could not place it on a map and possibly could not imagine what it was like. However, as our conversations unfolded, clues let slip about people's perceptions of Iceland before they had migrated: a moonlike landscape, friendly people, good looking

girls, work possibilities. An article in a newspaper, or a relative or a friend living in the country may have provided migrants-to-be with glimpses and ideas about what to expect in Iceland.

The idea that Iceland is 'a place beyond everything else' does not only speak of geography or imagination but also to the idea that the island possesses exceptional qualities, making it a very special place to live. Although some negative portrayals of life in Iceland have woven their way into the narratives of migrants I have spoken to in relation to this study, the perception of Iceland as an exceptional space is also prevalent in several accounts. Some of these narratives embody marvellously the profile of Iceland developed in nation-branding for international tourism purposes. Many participants in the research speak about experiencing their arrival in Iceland as a 'big adventure' and marvel over the wonders of the landscape and Icelandic geology. Others describe their migration to Iceland as a love affair: 'I fell in love with this country [...] I had a strong feeling when I came here that this is the country I belong to', or an addiction: 'I just loved it here. I got addicted to Iceland'. Migrants' narratives often also bring up ideas of safety, freedom, egalitarianism and (gender) equality, often evoked in the foreign media as characterising Iceland. They often frame life in Iceland as remarkable and extraordinary and remind us of the many images prompted by geographical imaginations.

4.4 The north of the North: exotic and rural Iceland

The majority of the participants have chosen to live in small towns in the north of Iceland. The idea that the capital area is somehow 'lacking' is quite prevalent in the narratives of the participants who did not deliberately look to live in such small towns or villages. Once migrants settled in Northern Iceland, they went through a process of re-scaling their imaginaries. The geographical imaginations they held changed and evolved with their experiences, resulting in most of them making a distinction between the north of Iceland and the rest of the country. They commonly talk about the north of the country as "totally Iceland", in opposition to the capital area in particular. They seem to be influenced by images and media portrayals of Reykjavík as depreciated by tourism and its accompanying Airbnb's and puffin shops. This is in accordance with what Lund et al. (2018) have described; how the north of Iceland comes with the idea of the authentic, and like the Arctic for the international traveller, "prompted and visualized as remote, "clean," and unpolluted" (p. 143). This portrayal of the Arctic is reappropriated and re-localised by my participants in the north of Iceland, which is then re-imagined as a place of authenticity where unspoiled nature and an authentic lifestyle prosper alongside each other.

Living in the North, in close proximity to nature, is considered an advantage and sometimes essential to the lives of the participants, who enjoy the all the attributes that they associate with rural areas: silence, calm and lack of disruption. In our

conversations, migrants speak about simplicity, and claim that living in the North makes for an easy and comfortable life, for example by never being stuck in a traffic jam. The risks and worries associated with towns and urban areas, notably in their home countries, disappear amid the peaceful atmosphere of rural Iceland. One of the migrant mother, Louisa, said:

> It's a much more beautiful country, cleaner and not as noisy and not as... dangerous. I remember when we were playing [in my home country] we were not supposed to go in alleys that are dark or something. You don't really have to fear about something like that here. When the kids are playing until eight o'clock at night and it's already dark you don't have to worry. (Female, Interview 3, Western Europe)

This excerpt echoes many other voices among the migrants I spoke with. Many migrant parents welcome the perceived safety of Iceland, and explained how it is a very privileged location for children to grow up in. Rural Iceland is considered safe and unthreatening, with no risks, no violence and none of the stress often associated with their home countries or hometowns. An underlying sense of comfort and privilege is distinguishable in the narratives of the participants, and the perceived relaxed work culture also gives many of the participants a sense of relative freedom and contentment in their daily lives.

Most of the participants living in the North celebrate the qualities of that particular place – its cleanliness, quietness and safety, while showing antipathy towards the capital city and the excesses of the urban modern space, such as traffic, noise, or crowds. A certain wholesome quality inherent to the North is denied to the South, which is figured as somehow incomplete or corrupt. This is how one migrant describes the capital city:

> Stress. You have taken this upon yourself when you go to Reykjavík. [...] Traffic and everything. So fast, everyone is moving, so much stress. I have to sort this and this and this ... It's not supposed to be like this. (Male, Interview 6, Central and Eastern Europe)

The conversations suggest that the North and its attributes are often idealised by many migrants and put in opposition with the capital area. However, ambivalence about the place is also prominent, and a clear contrast exists between geographical and social spaces. The geographical space of the North, with its proximity to nature and pristine landscapes, is largely framed as a positive in the lives of the participants, where even unfavourable weather conditions such as storms possess an unmistakable charm. However, the social North often entails a negative element, and if the cold of the climate can be endearing, it can be unpleasant when found in people's character. Many participants appreciate the close-knit community feeling while at the same time they find that it is difficult to create relationships or friendships in the place where they live in the North. The distinction between Northern Iceland and the capital city is used

by some of them to show that Reykjavík possesses a certain cosmopolitan openness that the north does not. The analysis from the interviews show that the construction of 'northern' socio-spatial identities impairs migrants' ability to create relationships easily with those who are "from there" (from the North of Iceland), as exemplified by this quote from a person who has lived in the north of Iceland for over thirty years:

> I don't know if they are insecure or reserved, or they don't get the need somehow? It's not the tradition to make friends like this, because the whole culture was based on these close-knit communities which were very interconnected and established. They haven't got a tradition of letting foreigners in or adjusting to foreigners. I think in Reykjavík it's a bit different, and I think Akureyri is a bit more provincial in that sense. More difficult to get into a social group or make friends. I know that in Reykjavík it's easier. (Male, Interview 19, Central and Eastern Europe)

Evoking provincialism recalls once again the existing gap between North and South, and more generally between Iceland and the rest of the world, as I have argued above. One study conducted among individuals living in the North of Iceland postulates that patterns of tolerance are related to personal histories and experiences of (im)mobility, and that tolerance towards migrants is higher among respondents who have lived in the capital city or abroad for more than a year (Bjarnason et al., 2019).

4.5 Beyond the exceptional North

In this chapter, the concept of geographical imagination was used to discuss how imaginaries inform both the migration decision and the expectations of migrants in Iceland. In this increasingly globalised and 'overheated' world where everything is 'too full, too fast' (Hylland-Eriksen, 2016), Iceland has managed to capitalise on a successful nation-branding and promotion campaign highlighting the charms of this secluded island of the North Atlantic. This success draws millions of travellers to the country every year. Thousands of migrants looking for job opportunities or a lifestyle more suited to their needs and desires have also been drawn to Iceland, and further research would be beneficial to understand if this tourism campaign and specific images of Iceland have had an impact on migration and other forms of mobilities.

Drawing on geographical imaginations of the 'North', this chapter examined the impact of imaginaries and images on some of the migrants' life-decisions. It investigated how marketing campaigns and the media have contributed to the circulation of representations of Iceland, and how these representations have affected their experience of mobility in Iceland and weaved their ways into migrants' narratives and into the evaluation of life in Iceland of those participating in my study. The majority of the participants (25) arrived in Iceland before 2011. As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, 2011 marks the eruption of Eyjafjallajökull and the beginning of Iceland's

powerful international tourism campaign. This may explain the lack of numerous geographical imaginations about Iceland from my participants in the country, who cannot formulate very many images before their arrival and most often frame their arrival as incidental. However, at the time of the interviews, Iceland has become a popular travel destination, and some of the images projected internationally are mirrored in my participants' narratives when they discuss their experiences of the country.

The portrayal of rural Iceland as an exceptional space has been established both by local and national promotion work, and is reflected in the views of some of this study's participants, who have come to see Iceland, and Northern Iceland in particular, as exotic and unique. These narratives embrace and embody the cultivation of a timeless and authentic space, somehow removed from the contingencies of modernity and its constraints. The participants conceive the Icelandic lifestyle and society and the sense of place as interconnected, for the socio-cultural egalitarian, free, democratic and feminist characteristics of the country seem to be connected to ideas and emotions taken from the landscape. Migrant parents often connect these ideas to an ideal family life and a good place to raise children. Life in this extraordinary space, so the narrative runs, cannot be anything else but exceptional.

The decision to migrate and the images one holds of the destination play a crucial role in shaping the expectations and future experiences of migrants. The narratives of my participants insist on the incidental character of their migration decision-making, but their decision remains connected to a specific need (i.e pursue a romantic partnership or a career in academia) or the desire to escape an uncomfortable situation (i.e going to the army or being unemployed). It is consistent with scholarship on migration and happiness which contends that our choices are grounded in hope for improvement (Hendriks & Bartram, 2019).

This chapter has focused on ideas of the exotic North which seem largely enriching and positive in the life of the participants, although some of them have accounts of individuals who have felt let down by the supposedly remarkable character of Iceland (this will be discussed in chapter 8 about gender roles). Migrants' initial perceptions of Iceland as a destination, and their preconceived notions about life in Iceland, will impact their overall satisfaction. Throughout the next chapters, we will see how expectations and the anticipation for better opportunities and improved living standards both can contribute to a sense of optimism and happiness, and a sense of disappointment if these expectations are not met. This idea echoes Stillman et al's study (2012) where they recognise that expectations and aspirations for migrants can result in disappointment. Migrants' narratives denying the perfection of the island are legion, and they deserve attention because they also mirror a certain idea of exceptionalism. As an example, one of our participants was a frustrated father who realised that Iceland was not as gender-equal, perfect and egalitarian as he expected it to be. These

narratives and counter-narratives are explored in the next chapters, where we shift our focus from the exceptional to the mundane by exploring the daily experiences of migrant parents. More specifically, I discuss family-making practices that transnational parents engage with while in Iceland, and the ways in which these practices reflect emotional entanglements.

5 Transnational family-making in Iceland

The family is a set of changing and various practices and relationships (Bell & Bivand Erdal, 2015), and transnational families negotiate being together or being apart like other families do. The transnational family comprises of various individuals living across nation states, cultures and languages. Bell and Bivand Erdal (2015) argue that transnational family processes include ways of doing and ways of being, the latter involving less perceptible processes such as "emotional attachments, identity construction processes [and] negotiating belonging" (p.79). Such processes are critical to understand the everyday experiences of migrants, which will help researchers to address more adequately the needs and choices of such families (Fox & Jones, 2013). The exploration of the everyday deserve attention to comprehend socio-cultural changes (Dyck, 2005) and to normalise migration as an everyday phenomenon. In this chapter I examine everyday family practices and processes, and practices of care and attachment in transnational families of this study. The first section of the chapter, *Being family: the transnational everyday* focuses on the experiences of the parents in the study who live in Iceland without their children. It describes the ways through which these transnational parents define and depict family in distance. The second section, *doing family*, focuses on the general practices transnational parents of my study engage in to communicate with their children and to display their emotions from afar. The third section, *displaying family*, revolves around the performative aspect of transnational familyhood. The chapter aims to understand how care and attachment between transnational parents and their children are manifested across distance. I start the chapter with a long excerpt from an interview, in which a father, Caleb, shares the challenges of parenting from a distance. Caleb, a 45-year-old man originally from Central America, ventured to Iceland as a young adult to study. During this time, he formed a relationship and became a father to children from that union. Caleb assumed custody of the children for several years after the relationship ended. As his children grew older, Caleb decided to return to his home country for several years. In that time, he remarried and became a parent once again. However, upon receiving a plea from his teenage son, Caleb decided to return to Iceland. Accompanied by his wife and youngest children, he went back to Iceland to reunite with his son and daughter.

*

I had the custody of the kids. So, I was a single father for some years in Iceland [...]. Then I felt like I was breaking down, and that was when I decided to move to [my home country]. I left without the kids. [...] Of course, I felt terrible about being [there] and the kids here in Iceland [with their mother]. I was paying huge amounts of telephone bills, because I was calling almost every day, home.

I was conscious that I have two kids. I was conscious that I needed to do something about [the distance], because they are older, and in my culture you are a father until you die, it doesn't matter how old the kids are. It's like me. My mom will just cook [for me] anytime.

You try to do as much as you can, but you can never do as much, right? So you try to be in contact and try to be a good dad, but it's never enough, you always have to try something new, try to find a way to communicate. [...]

I needed to come here, but I needed to... not to find a reason, because the reason was here already, but I just needed a little push, a little push. [...] They are always my kids. I don't know, I feel the only thing I regret about all this is maybe...you know, give them some more stability, when they were younger. Not being so unstable, moving from one place to another one, because that somehow affected their lives, you know...

This is important, I try not to look too much on the past, but I try to look at what is coming. [...] They come to me with different questions. [...] Sometimes I just pick up the phone and [...] go for coffee, and then we just talk about things, random things. (Interview 34, Male, Outside Europe)

*

5.1 Being family: the transnational everyday

As exemplified by Caleb in the narrative above, many parents in the research seem to correlate physical presence with being a good parent. However, when physical presence is unachievable, parents redefine their roles and their understanding of the family at the same time. In the interviews, distance from their children is often explained at length, justified and rationalised. Parents explain how they constantly try to bridge the distance between them and their children by communicating through the phone or Information and Communication Technologies using social media or messaging

applications, or by responding to their material and emotional needs from afar in other ways. Although they are not physically present, their sense of attachment and parental duty appears through acts of care, which symbolises for them the unity of the family and the endurance of the relationship between parents and children. Acts of care include phone calls or messages, emails, parcels, birthday cards, remittances and the occasional visit or holiday. There are other less visible acts of care, such as saving money for their children's future or getting an extra bedroom to accommodate their child or children when they come to visit. Migrant parents living away from their children also perform *thoughts* of care, often when they are unable to *act* their care. Miguel, for example, is always trying to think about how he could accommodate his son in his tiny accommodation when he comes visit, even though his finances do not allow him to rent a bigger place. He also recalls a day when his child sent him a screenshot of the news in their home country saying that it never gets dark in Iceland during summer. Next time Miguel went out into the midnight sun in Iceland, he took a photo which he sent to his son via a digital application, performing thoughts of care in the process. Planning a holiday or planning the future are also thoughts of care and embody parental affection from a distance.

Transnational parents aim to fulfil their parental role by responding to the specific needs of their children, but unlike co-present parents, they have to do it from a distance. These needs may be social, emotional, or financial (Baldassar & Merla, 2014). Transnational parents in this research rely on opportunities to display their attachment when they have to respond to a specific need or scenario. Parental care does not necessarily require physical presence, as exemplified by Caleb, who sees being family as the ability to respond to the needs of his children at particular times. He said:

> It's a bit confusing because there has been a lot of back and forth [...], so [the children were living] here [in Iceland], and then I was pretty settled in [home country], I had a really good job. [...] One day I just got a call from my son, and he said [...] I need you to come back home [to Iceland]. Exactly, I did that kind of face. Because you know, I had a good job, wife, and kids... but it was like... I thought about it for like two minutes and then I said yes, no worries, I'll be back. [...] So six months later I was in [Iceland] again [...] it was just crazy. But it meant a lot to him, because you know, I was *here* [my emphasis] for him. (Interview 34, male, outside Europe)

In this excerpt, parental care is emphasised through emotional presence as Caleb responds to his son's plea to 'come back home' by moving back to Iceland with his new wife and their children. Caleb does not only provide him with the promise of a physical reunion, he shows that he is a father who listens and then responds to his son's need and desire. Being here *for someone* is framed as being just as important as physical presence. Migrant parents I spoke with during interviews often felt powerless at being

geographically separated from their children, and instead tried to focus on 'being there' for their children when they wanted or needed it. Those parents said that they enjoy being given a specific role within the family, be it the provider, the emotional comforter, the holidaymaker or the rational helper. This feeling of inability is an important component of the parents' emotional lives, and their perceived lack of capacity and ability is a rather problematic component of their everyday lives. *Not being able to* is seen as a failure to perform as a parent, whether we talk about physical, emotional, or even material presence. Miguel is a 35-year-old man from outside Europe who lives in Northern Iceland. He has two children: the older one lives with his mother in Miguel's home country, and the younger one lives in Iceland. Miguel and his ex-partner share custody of the latter. He shares his experiences of navigating his long-distance relationship with his older child:

> I don't want to solve everything through money, but if [it is] the only way that I can help through the distance... it's not that I [don't care], I would like to see [my child]. Like the other day when [my ex-partner] called me and said he wasn't doing good in school, I don't know... [I wish I could] stay there... [if I was there with him, I could ask what's going on with the school, or try to study together, push him to study, or try to help him to focus, you know, that kind of stuff. This is what I would like to do. (Interview 28, male, outside Europe)

Miguel does not want to reduce the father-son relationship to a financial transaction, even though he admits that this is one of the tangible ways through which he can convey his commitment to his son. Providing his support for daily matters can be difficult over distance. It is clear from the analysis of the interviews that the parents' inability to share the everyday is not related in any way to the feelings they have for their children, and the discontinuity between what they *feel* and what they are *able to do* confers on parents a certain vulnerability. Here, vulnerability is described by Galabru (2019) as exposure to experiences and encounters that one does not initiate or encourage. Galabru refers to Butler's understanding of vulnerability as the condition through which we experience "ways we do not choose" (Butler, 2016, p. 22). The parents are exposed to suffering because their acts and thoughts of care rarely reflect accurately the ways they feel about their children, as represented by another father, Martin. Martin moved to Northern Iceland from Central Europe after a difficult employment situation and a break-up with the mother of his only child. After a long custody battle, Martin is allowed visitation and parental rights at certain times throughout the year. He explains:

> I love my daughter. And I always will. [...] I love her more than any woman, and it includes my mom. [...] I'm not saying I have done everything perfect. I've made some mistakes, maybe I wasn't there when

> she needed me or… I didn't turn up as the best father in the world, but I'm trying. (Interview 29, male, Central and Eastern Europe)

Reflecting on his parental responsibility, Martin is saying that no acts would be adequate enough to replicate his love for his daughter. As he laments over the distance that separates him from her, he also admits that distance is not always experienced as an impediment or an inconvenience. Sometimes it is particularly valued as conferring the possibility to act in an otherwise impossible situation, as exemplified by this quote:

> I have a right to see my daughter at Christmas time, and for Easter, and one month at summertime. […] I went away […] because I want to provide for my child. I didn't have this opportunity [elsewhere], working for what, 300 euros? While you have to take 200 for living, how could I pay my maintenance? How could I even take her for holiday? Now thanks to this opportunity I can go at any time if she needs me. […] If she wants to go to university in Oxford, I want to be ready to provide. If she wants to go to University of Yale, I want to be ready. That's why I came to Iceland. (Interview 29, male, Central and Eastern Europe)

Martin describes being a parent as having the ability to meet the needs of his child, as he demonstrates this with thoughts of a hypothetical future. Martin depicts the father-daughter relationship as the heart of his everyday choices and actions. He requires to be in a situation comfortable enough for him to meet the material and financial needs of his daughter, including hypothetical and future needs. He does not necessarily view distance as a problem, but not being able to provide and meet his daughter's needs is. Martin echoes several other transnational parents who concur that the parent-child relationship is based on meeting the needs of one another, which implies that distance is not the only defining challenge for transnational parents and families. That said, distance does remain an important predicament in transnational families, something that migrants learn to live with and navigate as they go along. Miguel reminds us that distance among families is not only a transnational matter but can be an issue within the borders of the same country, as exemplified by work on long-distance commuting (Dorow & Mandizadsa, 2018; Pini & Mayes, 2012). Martin explains that life in his home country did not guarantee more encounters with his child because his ex-partner moved to the capital with their child, while he remained 1000 kilometres away:

> [In my home country], I was already divorced. But my ex was living in the same town [with our child]. At one point she decides to move 1000 kilometres away [with him]. It was difficult economically [speaking], you know at some point I was giving her 50% of my salary […] And with the other 50, I was renting an apartment […]. So basically, it was fifty for her, and fifty for the apartment, and for the other stuff, [I depended on] if I was able to do extras at work.

> Stéphanie: How often did you see [your child] when she moved?
>
> My salary was 1500, super good. But I was paying her 750 and I was renting for 750. So… How many times do you think I can go [and see my son]? [laughing] It was impossible for me. (Interview 28, male, outside Europe)

By explaining how a financial impossibility prevented him to physically bridge the distance that separated him from his son, Miguel demonstrates that the conditions for providing time and care as a parent are also determined by resources and lifestyles, including when families are all living in the same country. Tatiana is a woman from Central Europe who has a child living with her in Iceland, and an older child who lives with an ex-partner in her home country. Tatiana moved to Iceland while she was pregnant with her second child, and she has been living in Iceland for almost a decade. Tatiana talks about her life with her oldest daughter, before she moved to Iceland:

> I was so tired going one hour to work, working, going one hour in traffic home, I was at seven o'clock at home. There was no time to spend with [my] child, almost one hour she was going to sleep. Day after day. (Interview 27, female, Central and Eastern Europe)

She explains that the lifestyle she was living and the work expectations in her home country did not allow her to spend as much time with her first child as she would have liked. Now that she is living a comfortable lifestyle in Iceland, she hears from her oldest daughter daily and she can go and visit her every other month. She also invites her to stay two months with her during the summer. Distance has its challenges, but it can and does offer advantages as well. The results from my study demonstrate that parents negotiate distance however they can and find different ways of being together at a distance. Acts and thoughts of care are an essential part of the relationship between parents and their children, and emotional work is considered as an everyday parental responsibility.

Memory also serves as emotional work: photographs, recollections and text messages can support this sense of being together. During an interview with Tatiana, whom I talked with at length, we walked around her house where she showed me pictures of her family, including her daughter. Most of the pictures are of her children, and her oldest daughter figures prominently in the living room space. There are pictures of her when she was small, receiving Confirmation, and together on holidays; mother and daughter are together sending in front of Big Ben, or enjoying a sunny day in what seems like a hot country. Another participant, a father, showed me the collection of text messages he had sent his daughter over the last weeks; he scrolls through them as one does to grasp memories of togetherness and as remnants of love and attention.

The predicament of these transnational parents reflects the conflict which may arise between the collective needs of the family and the individual needs of migrants. Jones (2013) mentions that social psychologists are working on understanding how migration could become a tool to lessen the gap that exist between individual and family needs, and this is precisely what my participants are aiming for in their daily lives: they aim to find a way to fulfil their own desires as well as their parental and family wishes. Being a family and a parent across borders for the participants in my study implies a careful negotiation and equilibrium between one's individual happiness and the collective happiness of the family. On one hand, these transnational parents tread as best as they can to avoid emotional pain to their children, and to themselves. On the other hand, they recognise that their individual happiness is important and supports happiness at a collective level in the family. If parents are happy, they consider that they will care better for their children. If we go back to the excerpt at the beginning of the chapter, Caleb is telling us that he decided to leave 'without the kids' back to his home country because he 'was breaking down'. He 'felt terrible about being [there] and the kids here in Iceland', but he had to prioritise his own well-being to be able to recover from the difficulties he was facing at the time. It allowed him to take some time to think, and to plan the best course of action for himself and his children in the future. Miguel is also explaining why his own well-being is important for his children and the family:

> Am I happy living here in [Iceland]? You know... In the long term, no. [...] It is okay, it is better than [home country], but there are a lot of things I'm not okay with. [...] I'm not trying to think about right now, I'm trying to think in the long-term. If I am not happy here and I am living here for my son... you know eventually my son [will] have a sad father. [...] I would like to say [that] I can see him once or twice a year but in that time, when I'm seeing him, I have my free time with him, try to match it with the vacation, and then spend time with him, have quality time with him, doing stuff, I don't know, something like that... This is what my health tells me right now.
>
> S: You think maybe that's the price for you to pay to feel happy?
>
> M: Yes. I don't know. What is clear for me is that it's okay right now to live [here] but in the long-term it's not possible, I will go crazy here. (Interview 32, male, outside Europe)

The challenge of transnational parenting is about finding new ways of being together across distance. Miguel is trying to reconcile his need to leave Iceland with the need to care for his children, in particular the youngest who lives in Iceland. He explains that the effect of staying in a place where he feels unwell could have damaging effect on his health and well-being and wishes to prioritise this in order to be able to care effectively for his children. The connection with his children is thought of in terms of '*quality*'.

Miguel may not be able to see his youngest child as often if he leaves Iceland, but he envisions being able to have more enjoyable moments with him if he does. Leaving would require some adjustments in family-making, but it would allow Miguel to fulfil his own social and emotional needs.

Although Caleb discussed a past experience and Miguel talks about a future one, both fathers share the same narrative. They both insist that leaving their children is never a light-hearted decision, but that it can be necessary for their own sense of self and well-being. Being a 'whole' individual in control of their own choices is preferable to them than being 'broken' selves in undesirable situations. Distance is something that can be negotiated, as are family-making processes. Transnational parents' emotions determine the making and unmaking of the family across time and space; at times the parent/child unit needs to be altered to allow parents to deal with difficult times. At other times, this unit can be remodelled, and the family brought closer together.

5.2 Doing family: family-making in transnational families

Transnational literature demonstrates that transnational practices are determined by a moral economy of obligations and responsibilities, in which care is at the heart, not only of embodied care in the sense "caring *for* someone", but also of emotional care, in the sense of "caring *about* someone" (Baldassar & Merla, 2014). A good example of this moral economy of care is the celebration of Filipino Overseas Workers as national heroes, which emphasises their moral obligation not to forget their families "at home" and to encourage remittances (Rodriguez, 2002). *Being there for* falls under the concept of care, and much research on transnational families has been looked at through this particular concept (Ducu, 2018). Care practices include remittances, communication, and other displays of affection that can be tangible or intangible such as thoughts or plans and projects for the future.

5.2.1 Remittances

Tangible family practices include "sending money, travelling to visit, or talking on Skype" (Bell & Bivand Erdal, 2015, p. 79). Interestingly, material and financial support is not always primarily understood as a domain of care in transnational scholarship because it is seen as a commodification of love. Sending money can be seen as an opposite to emotional care, although some literature recognises that remittances and gifts are as valid a domain of care as phone calls or visits (Coe, 2011; Haagsman & Mazzucato, 2013). Coe (2011) insists that love and attachment can and are expected to be displayed through material gifts in Ghanaian culture. Remittances, a type of transaction "at the core of transnationalism" (Falicov, 2005, p. 401), are not only a financial undertaking but carry emotional weight as well. The fact that Martin or Tatiana send more alimony than they are legally required to is not exclusively a financial matter, but emotional work and a symbolic message producing clues about their understanding

of parenthood, status and duty. In the section above, Miguel explained that money is 'the only way that I can help through the distance'. He is not the only transnational parent of this study to explain that financial support or remittances are one way of investing in their children's life consistently. In one interview, Marta talked about how she is 'trying to help her [daughter] in other ways' when she is with her, but when she is not, money is the main mean through which she can offer her support and care.

Although the transnational parents in this study are keen to explain that financial support is not a replacement for emotional support, it is a very important vector through which they convey their attachment and their love to their children. Both Miguel and Tatiana discussed the alimony they send every month to their children, it feels as if sending money is hardly about finances for neither of them. Rather, it has become a reminder of their affection, a voice, and a method to communicate with their loved ones. Money is not seen as antithetical to care -it *is* care. Another transnational father, Martin, explains it this way:

> Absolutely, I was [paying alimony] even when I had no money. There was a time I knew I wouldn't eat, and I still paid because that was for my child. [...] I'm a real father and I'm a good father. (Interview 29, male, Central and Eastern Europe)

In this quote, the father reflects on the intricacies between financial and emotional care. He shows that distance does not relieve transnational parents of their duties, and that the connection between financial and emotional care are often entangled in relationships between transnational parents and their children. The importance of remittances thus cannot be informed only from a financial point of view. More than a moral obligation, it is a practice that allows for consistent and sustained care between parents and their children when physical co-presence is rare. Money can also grant more visits and more activities together. Some children have strong expectations from their parents when they come visit, as exemplified by Tatiana's narrative:

> [When I] go to [home country] she is always waiting for me to buy her something, and we go shopping. (Interview 27, female, Central and Eastern Europe)

The perceptions of Tatiana's daughter regarding the higher standard of living in Iceland, and the higher wages, has informed her expectations about what her mother could and should dispense towards her needs and wants. Although it involves a financial undertaking, it offers an opportunity for spending time together and bonding as a family. Another mother from outside Europe, Nadia, reflects on her time away from her son, before he decided to join her in Iceland:

> Not anyone can give him what I am giving to him. Not his father, not anyone in [his home country]. So that's why I was pretty sure that he

> would come, even if it might take a long time. Because he lived with me for a long time, he is a bit shy to ask his father or his stepmother to buy him something or do something for him. So even when he was in [his home country] he was calling me and saying 'please mom can you buy me this'. I said please ask your father to do that, but he was a little bit… not afraid but shy […]. That is why I thought yes, he would come here because he feels more secure and safe here, with me. (Interview 33, female, outside Europe)

This excerpt shows how her son's plea to buy him something became a powerful reminder of the special relationship she has with him. In this story, what is important for Nadia is the fact that her son chooses to reach out to *her* for a specific need. Not comfortable to ask his father or his stepmother, he does contact the person he feels closest to emotionally, even if he is thousands of kilometres apart from his mother at the time. Nadia became therefore convinced that it was only a matter of time before her son would join her in Iceland, for no one could 'give him what [she is] giving to him'. In this example, the overlap between financial and emotional care is easily demonstrable. Not only does Nadia covers her son's material needs, but she is the one person that cares for him more than others. In many transnational families, gifts and money become vectors for love and affection. More than pure financial transactions, they provide reassurance that transnational parents are emotionally present and *there for* their children.

5.2.2 Communication

Another important practice in transnational families involves the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The role of ICT in transnational family life has been well documented in the literature, and phone calls and communication through various applications such as Skype or WhatsApp are an important part of the life of families living apart (Nedelcu & Wyss, 2016; Wilding, 2006), as they facilitate sharing everyday experiences and hence what has been called co-presence. New means of communication and technology have facilitated parenting "from a distance" and allowed transnational parents to partially reconstruct their role as parents while being away to work (Miller & Madianou, 2011). The role of ICT technologies to facilitate togetherness and family-making has also been highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic during which families across the world were separated for long periods of time (Twamley et al., 2023).

The parents in this research engage in communication with their children to varying degrees and in various ways. Some use phone calls, most use text messages or messaging apps, as well as video chats applications. A few transnational parents use social media to connect with their children, often using the private messaging function. The frequency of contacts is most often determined by the age of the child or the

children living away from their parent, by the parent-child relationship, and by the quality of the relationship between the parent living in Iceland and the family member(s) who care(s) for the child (most often in the home country, although it sometimes happens that the carer of the child also lives abroad with the child). For parents who are divorced or separated, communication with a young child is often mediated through the ex-partner. That can make communication difficult, especially when the divorced parents do not have cordial relations. Martin explains that his daughter is too young to have a phone or a computer of her own, or to use the family phone or computer without help. Therefore, his communication with his child is monitored and controlled by his ex-partner, which causes some problems as their relationship is tumultuous. Despite his many attempts, Martin cannot get in direct contact with his child, and this causes him a lot of pain. Having to mediate communication with a child through an ex-partner can be a delicate endeavour, and an added emotional burden for transnational parents. While they suffer the absence of their children, they also have to deal with the anger, resentment or sadness that accompanies their relationship with the other parent of their child. The advancement in ICT, and access to new technologies from a young age has somehow facilitated communication between transnational parents and their children. After a certain age, the other parent no longer needs to be involved in communication and the relationship between the parent abroad and the child can be more relaxed and private. A father describes communication with his son over the years:

> There is a lot of discussions [with my ex-wife], it is typical divorce gna gna gna [mimicking arguing]. For several years it was phone calls, so [then] it was more like 'Hi hi. Is [child] there?', 'Yes', 'Okay'. That's it. [...] When [he] started to grow it was easier, but [...] it's also hard to find him at home, if he's not doing anything, like I say when he was young that was easy, [but] now [he is] going out with some friends... (Interview 32, male, outside Europe)

Once the burden of speaking to an ex-partner eases, other challenges await. Transnational parents in this study lament the little interest teenagers seem to have to hold casual conversations with their parents. The participants who are parents of teenagers state that speaking by phone or WhatsApp is not a big priority for their children, whatever the distance between them. I will discuss communication through ICT in greater detail in chapter 6, but it is noteworthy that small everyday actions are of significant importance for doing family across distance. Receiving a text message, for example, is important to transnational parents and hold significant symbolic value of their status in the family. Doing family across borders does not only occur in during transnational visits and it is not only mediated through co-presence. Doing family is hanging out together on social media, trying to solve a school problem over the phone, or receiving a picture on a mobile device. All the actions which show care and

thoughtfulness have great emotional impact on the making of the family and contribute to kin work.

Transnational parents suffer from the distance that separate them from their children, but the distance of a parent can lead to significant improvements in their lives and in the lives of their children and their family. Economic benefits are not to be ignored, even if not every transnational parent in this study has gained from a financial perspective. Positive changes can occur in the participants' lives, from lifestyle benefits to the satisfaction of social or affective needs.

5.3 Displaying family

This section entitled *Displaying family* focuses on the values transnational parents wish to project upon their children and the activities they undertake when they are together in physical spaces. it delves into the strategies employed by these parents to carefully project ideals, moral principles, and familial traditions. Moreover, it sheds light on the deliberate activities these parents choose to undertake, emphasising the significance of shared experiences and meaningful interactions that serve as tangible manifestations of the bonds they hold with their children.

Most of the participants in this research strive to visit their home countries at least once a year, although the frequency of visits is often determined by money. The parents of this study living away from their children who are in Europe and have the means to do so go several times a year to visit them. However, the parents who are further away and/or who need considerable amounts of money to travel to visit their child go less often – every year or sometimes every other year. Transnational parents who are comfortable financially can sustain contact with their children more regularly since it allows them to travel more often or to invite their child/ren to stay with them in Iceland.

When they go to see their children, or when their children come to visit them, I found that transnational parents adopt one of two approaches. In the first approach, some parents want to confer an exceptional character on family visits and offer an experience which is similar to a traveling experience: an exotic escape from the everyday, or a treat. In the second approach, transnational parents want to make the visit as 'unexceptional' and as close to everyday life as possible, to "show [child] what is like real life", to use Miguel's words. Marta situates herself somewhere between the two approaches. She will happily take her daughter to London or Barcelona, but also invites her to spend the summer in Iceland with a friend:

> [...When she comes here to Iceland] she is coming sometimes with some friends, and they are just living here. (Interview 27, female, Europe)

Abel is a 39 year-old father of three children who live with their mother in Western Europe. Abel moved very recently to Iceland and is hoping to bring his oldest children

to live with him in Iceland in the near future. When Abel goes sightseeing around Northern Iceland, he makes sure to show his children the exceptional touristic qualities of Iceland by sending them pictures and using video calls. He intends to show them a good time when they come to see him:

> Actually, yesterday me and [my friend] went to the waterfalls, and obviously I'm trying to brainwash the [children] as well so I Skype and say look at all that, they're really into nature, now they are. So I was just showing [the waterfalls]. They were like 'Oh my God, we need to go there', they want to come in anyway I don't really need to… […] Like I say I was face timing them, yesterday you know at the waterfall and they were like 'Wow… We need to come there' and all that stuff. (Interview 31, male, Southern Europe)

Abel is showing the Icelandic landscape to tempt his children to come and visit him in Iceland, using imagery which seems unusual and extraordinary. He is exoticising Iceland because it makes it a desirable destination for his children. Another father, Miguel, has the opposite approach because he wants to share a very 'normal' and mundane everyday when his son comes to visit him. For him, going snowmobiling and eating out often are misrepresentations of his daily life in Iceland. Although he is hoping that his child will come live with him in the future, he does not want to 'oversell' Iceland as a fantastic destination. Instead, he wants to share an unexceptional routine with him, as exemplified by his narrative:

> When my son came here […] for a month, I was working Monday to Friday 8 to 16. So he probably woke up at one, like I say as a teenager it was okay. And then it was like WhatsApp and Snapchat all the time with his friends and stuff like that, that's daily life for him. On the phone and stuff like that… […] While he was at home he was totally connected, then he maybe walked or go somewhere. But it was winter, I didn't have too much money… In a way I didn't want to buy him out. How can I say this? […] Okay, I can talk to his mama and say I want him to come to live with me, but eventually, now more than before, the final decision will be on him, you know. […] Right now, he's 14, he could say [that he wants to come and live with me]. So instead of buying him out and [say] "oh, if you come to live with me, you will have all the things" … No, no, no. [I wanted to show him] this is how it's going to be if you come to live with me, sort of. I'm going to be working like this, [you will] go to school… […] I like to cook so I usually ask him to help me cook, [we go to the] swimming pool, we went shopping maybe once…
>
> Stéphanie: Did he like the pool?

> Miguel: Yes, yes! But I didn't want him to, you know, let's go and spend… like going to the mall every day and eat Dominos [pizza] every day or… no, no, no.
>
> Stéphanie: You want him to come because he really wants to.
>
> Miguel: Yes, and actually show him what is like real life. […] When I go on vacation to [see him in my home country], I still have privileges. I still can do things that [I usually cannot], I'm on vacation, so yeah it's like let's go and have some ice cream. It's like it's super cool. But here, I can buy ice cream, sure, but in two months I cannot buy ice cream every day, or do certain things… so it was like more a regular life. You know, okay I understand it was his vacation and I came here to [Northern Iceland], we did a few things around, but life was not excursion, you know, it was regular life. And it was okay, you know. Like I say, at the end I felt that connection with him, that I didn't have before. And it will be super nice to keep it like that. (Interview 28, male, outside Europe)

It is clear from Miguel's long excerpt that he wants to recreate the everyday when his son comes to visit: cook together, go to the pool [in Iceland bathing culture is important but unexceptional], have a routine and enjoy unexceptional times together. Not only can he not afford to engage in 'exceptional' activities such as eating takeaways or making excursions, but he is trying to show his son what 'real life' is like if he decides to come and live with him in the future. Miguel wants his son to come and live with him, but he wants him to make an informed decision based on the unexceptional everyday, not from 'exceptional' experiences which would inaccurately represent his daily life in Iceland.

Transnational parents in the study work towards making the family through different means. While Miguel wants to keep his son's visit as low-key as possible, other parents take the opposite stance and engage in touristic activities when their children come to visit, or when they go and visit them. For these parents, the experience of being together needs to be extraordinary.

Some children have been influenced by geographical imaginations of Iceland, and of Europe for non-European children. Having a parent living abroad can contribute to social prestige among the children's peers, especially if the children themselves go and visit their parents, as exemplified by these narratives:

> In school, she's kind of proud that she's always going abroad and [she is] telling [her friends] about Iceland. […] She likes to travel to Iceland. (Interview 27, female, Central and Eastern Europe)

> [My son] thinks it's kind of cool, you know, [to have a father who lives here]. I don't know, for example when he comes here, he also likes... like I say, the thing about it if you are 14 and if you say... Well the first thing you have to see is the environment in [my home country], not many people travel abroad, yes you can go to [a neighbouring country], but maxi, top. Some people might go to the United Sates, but to Europe? No. And at 14 years old, twice? You know, it's like Iceland... how can I say... Ok if I went to Europe [from my home country], I would go to Italy, to Spain, to London. But Iceland is kind of a unique place, strange. (Interview 28, male, outside Europe)

The children of these parents feel proud to live a transnational lifestyle that takes them to Iceland. The prestige associated with having a parent living in Iceland often brings transnational parents and their children closer because it encourages the children to visit Iceland, and to get involved in their parents' lives from afar. It allows transnational parents to create emotional bonds with their children and to share more with them. Going to visit their children is a specific condition which is both important and essential to transnational parents' happiness. It is highly determinant in the production of positive or negative emotions, as exemplified by all the narratives above. Visits are associated with intimacy and joy; the absence of visits produces despair and frustration. These emotions are not solely relevant in the context of parent-child absence, since distance from the whole family produces a range of feelings that can enhance joy or pain. I now explore how migration contributes to a plurality of emotional relations with various family members.

5.4 The extended family

Migration redefines the way transnational and migrant parents living in Iceland engage with extended family members. The making and unmaking of the family happen at various levels and across different strands of kin relationships, and interactions between transnational and migrant parents and their family vary in intensity and in frequency. Transnational families are defined as groups of interconnected relatives settled across several countries (Ducu, 2018). Most research on transnational families focuses on members of the nuclear family such as transnational mothers, fathers and children (*ibid.*), and less often on members of the extended family (with exceptions such as Krzyżowski & Mucha, 2014; Skaptadóttir, 2010). In this section I follow Baldassar et al.'s (2014) definition of the family, which "includes both the nuclear family and the extended types whose members are actively engaged in family survival and maintenance, ranging from those whose roles are more marginal" (p. 159). When migrants decide to live abroad, they leave behind a whole network of relatives. The impact of separation in migration is important for the emotional experience of transnational families. The absence of extended family in everyday life is an important topic in the interviews realised for this study, both for migrant parents who have to deal

with separation from their parents, siblings, and other extended family, and for transnational parents who have to consider separation from their children and other relatives.

Picking their children up from school, sharing a meal at the dinner table in the evening, reading a bedtime story – the majority of parents living in Iceland with their dependent children spend a significant amount of time with them engaging in mundane activities. Their sense of being together is strong, given that they have little or no family around and therefore all family and parenting activities fall solely on the parents. Elina is a mother of three. She moved to Iceland with her husband and explains how she has had to abandon her career to become a full-time mother. Her choice is based on several reasons, one of them being the lack of support from her family. She explained:

> I don't know if I would be able to find a job which would correspond to my education or something. I'm [an] engineer. I don't need to do that, but I also don't want to clean and sweep the floors which is the most common thing you can do as a [foreigner]. The main problem [is that at] one o'clock I have to be at home, just to drive [the children] somewhere, otherwise we can forget the activities because nobody else can help. No grandmas, nobody else, so it's on us, everything, and I would say it's on me. (Interview 22, female, Central and Eastern Europe)

The absence of extended family expands the parental role of Elina who sees herself overwhelmed with childcare and responsibilities. Without family support, she says that she does not have the flexibility which could allow her to pursue her own endeavours or her own career. She is fully devoted to support her children in their daily activities, at the disadvantage of her own desires for connections outside the home. Not many of the participants in this study receive visits from family members, but two of them have a grandparent who comes to Iceland every year for extended periods of time to help with the children. The mobile parents of adult migrants have been constituted as 'Generation Zero' (Wyss & Nedelcu, 2018). This term refers to the support and care provided to adult migrants by their parents. The help they give can take many forms (Bjørnholt & Stefansen, 2018), but it usually entails help with childcare and education, whether it is helping the children to practice their mother tongue, taking them for walks or helping with house chores. Practical help is also supplemented by emotional help and support, because adult migrants often feel comforted by family visits. Moreover, the bond between grandparents and grandchildren is an important one for migrant parents. This father demonstrates that even though his father-in-law is too old to provide significant help, he gives a great amount of emotional comfort to his wife and to their children:

> My father-in-law came last year for a month and a half, and he is coming this year as well, probably again for a month and a half. We are inviting him for July because most of the time I'm [doing fieldwork elsewhere]. So

> he's coming to be a company for [wife]. He's helpful but he's 75, so he's not doing everything, but he's there and you can chat to him about this and that [...] or you can tell [kids] to go with him. (Interview 20, male, Central and Eastern Europe)

This excerpt shows us that presence in itself ('he's *there*') performs emotional care between a father and his adult daughter, and between a grandfather and his grandchildren. Support and care are performed simply through the grandfather's physical presence. A visit from a grandparent is a great source of emotional comfort, and the sense of doing family together a respite from the challenges of living 'alone' in Iceland. Among my participants, visits of grandparents or other family members are not very common. However, their digital presence is described in several interviews. Talking to a parent/grandparent is part of the everyday of many migrant parents, as shown in this conversation with Maja, who has one child:

> My mom is always saying that she misses me, every day. When I came to Iceland, she was sending me a SMS every day. [...] Every day for a few years, like three years or something. And if I didn't reply immediately, she [would call and ask if I was] okay, so I answered immediately [laughing]. I had saved a template for a reply, just send it. One for Monday, one for Tuesday... we used to also speak through Skype but not so often, now we speak everyday through Skype because of [child]. So we are eating breakfast and there's Grandma and Grandpa on Skype, and my sister on weekends. (Interview 13, female, Central and Eastern Europe)

Maja's narrative is a great example of the ambivalence of family relations between migrant adult parents and their own parents since desire for contact is not always equal between them. Maja's example emphasises the necessity for both distance and closeness within the family. While she is touched by her mother's communication attempts, she also finds them overbearing. This need of equilibrium between too much and too little presence can sometimes be re-established when adult migrants have children themselves. As Maja's need for support grows and in the company of her daughter, she happily contacts her mother herself daily. The frequency of communication with her mother intensified after Maja had a child. To strengthen the bond between her daughter and her mother, she made a habit of calling the latter on video every day during breakfast. Such rituals are common among the participants, although few entails daily communication without fail. Many of the participants speak to their families on the phone or see them on video every week or every fortnight. Of all relatives, migrant parents highly value grandparents' visits and communication. Most try to engage their children in a strong relationship with them through visits and video calls. Grandparents are valued because they offer practical help such as childcare or house chores, but mostly because the relationship between grandparents and

grandchildren is cherished. Their virtual presence allows for the construction of the everyday with other family members, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Virtual communication is supplemented by occasional family visits in migrant parents' countries of origin. Academic scholarship considers family visits as a practice essential to kin work which restores 'family solidarity and [migrants'] sense of belonging' (Wojtyńska & Skaptadóttir, 2020). The participants in this study generally travel to their countries of origin more often than they receive family visits, but the frequency of visits vary greatly depending on personal circumstances and desires. Migrants who have been living in Iceland for a shorter time tend not to go as often to their countries of origin, while migrants who have been in Iceland for longer often have established routines to travel to see their extended families. Maja, Jona, Kanya and Yan, who have lived in Iceland for over ten years, go to their home countries with their children every summer for at least four weeks. Elina, Ciara, Nadia and Viktor, who have lived in Iceland less than two years, have not returned to their countries for a visit yet. The frequency and length of visit also increases when migrant adults become parents, as shown again by Maja:

> I'm going there for holidays, with [my child], I can do everything with her, she can meet her family there, but before [child], I was in Poland only for Christmas and only for five to ten days, I didn't want to go longer. [...] I think it's important for a child to speak with her grandma or grandpa. (Interview 13, female, Central and Eastern Europe)

The desire for connection to a place, culture, and language generally increases when migrant adults become parents. Maja's need for connection with her home country and her parents had been relatively low before she had a child. While most of the participants express a moderate longing to be in their home country, they almost always mention that visits are important and needed for their children. Maja now wants to build this connection for her child, and immerse her in her culture and language. To build up her daughter's capacity to understand her own language and her own socio-cultural environment, and to build bonds with her family, she insists that it is important to spend long periods of time with her in her home country.

The challenges of maintaining bonds across distance do not solely impact transnational parents, but all families affected by separation. Modes of communication and the maintenance of familial bonds across borders are determined by a variety of factors, including the nature of the relationship with extended kin, and with children and their caregiver(s). The importance of maintaining these bonds across distance weighs heavily upon migrant and transnational parents, who need to negotiate their own desire with the wishes of kin around them. Maja did not think too fondly about her mother's daily communication, but she has learned to embrace the opportunity to encourage a

connection between her daughter and her parents -and by extension, her language and culture.

Remittances, communication through texts, phone and video calls, and visits: all these family practices build and reinforce bonds with various members of the family. This chapter demonstrated that distance is not about redefining family roles and family love and care, but about redesigning the ways through which these emotions are conveyed and acted upon. The ability of transnational parents to nurture familial bonds with their children or with extended kin is constrained by factors such as time, space and financial resources. Amidst these factors, parents' emotions are carefully played out and balanced in lives lived between presence and absence. The next chapter discusses how these different kinds of presence and absence are intertwined and negotiated in transnational families.

6 Co-presence and parents' feelings and emotions

This chapter examines emotions and their expression in transnational families through the lens of different types of 'presence'. More specifically, it engages with the emotional experience and subjectivities of migrant parents in the context of the 'absence' of their children. The chapter aims to provide insights into the ways in which distance shape the emotions of transnational parents and the influence it has on their interactions with their children and their experiences. We cannot presume that emotions are socio-cultural universals and that they are understood and performed similarly across countries and cultures. Moreover, English-language concepts may not be global or undisputed (McKay, 2007). However, emotional literacy, or the ability to recognise one's own and other's emotions, is an important predictor of 'cultural adjustment' and happiness for transnational migrants (*ibid.)*. Baldassar (2008, p. 247) argues that "emotions of missing and longing motivate kin to construct four types of shared (co)presence - virtual, proxy, physical and imagined". While absence in the study is primarily experienced by migrant parents as an emotional matter, there is significant variation across the participants with regards to challenges related to parenting and (emotional) care across borders. Ideas about what constitutes good care and good parenting fluctuate between people of different cultural backgrounds, gender, and class.

Transnational literature often describes mothers thinking more strongly about their obligation to care physically and emotionally for their children (Horton, 2009), and posits the performance of fathers' care through the fulfilment of financial obligations (Pribilsky, 2012). However, my findings concur with other research asserting that care across borders allows for emergent alternative ways to be a parent. In their study of transnational family life, Baldassar et al. (2007) recognise that men are as likely to communicate with family members as women. Pribilsky's (2012) study shows that transnational mobility authorises Ecuadorian fathers to display more intimate emotional connections with their children than Ecuadorian family and gender culture would allow if they were under the same roof. When sharing the same household in Ecuador, fathers are expected to display little emotional connection to their children, but living apart allows them to have more flexibility to choose how to display their affection. Distance from their family and their country alleviates culture-specific obligations and thus supports the creation of alternative care or parenting roles such as "Skype daddy" and can allow greater intimacy with their children.

I begin the chapter with a long excerpt from a mother who explains the sadness she felt

when her son did not want to come to live with her in Iceland, accompanied by her hope and then relief when he finally did. For this mother, co-presence was essential to their relationship, both for her child and for herself. I then discuss the emotional experiences and implications of the four various types of presence in transnational families.

*

> I was living in [Europe], I came here in February. There was school, [so my son stayed] with my sister. He could not stay with me, [he said] he had school and his friends, and that he would not come with me. He has his father, who lives close to my sister's house. [...] I talked to his dad and he agreed our son would stay with my sister. My sister is a woman like me, she is like a mother, and I liked the fact that my son could stay with her. On weekends he would go to his dad. [...]
>
> My mother spoke to me and said [to give him] time, that he would change his mind. [...] He started to change his mind because he wanted to see his baby sister [who was born in Iceland while he was living in mainland Europe]. And now he is very happy.
>
> Living far away from him was like losing half of my life, my life here and the other half, thinking about him... [...] (Interview 33, female, outside Europe)

*

6.1 Virtual co-presence

The importance of digital connectivity has been amplified and highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic when families had to become increasingly reliant on virtual communication to bond with their loved ones (Twamley et al., 2023).

One of the most common types of presence in transnational families is virtual (co)presence, which I have discussed briefly in the previous chapter by eploring the ways through which parents and children communicate digitally. Wilding et al. (2020) argue that it is the emotions contained in media practices and communication, rather than the media practices themselves, that constitute transnational family life. They use Ahmed's notion of "affective economies" and Baldassar and Wilding's "digital kinning" to contend that emotions circulate within and even constitute groups and families. The authors perceive digital practices, and in particular images, not only as expressions of love but as currency, which can be accumulated and circulated within the family and a certain social network.

The mobile phone has replaced the letter as the most important medium through which

(transnational) families communicate. The mobile phone, coupled with access to the internet, plays a significant role in the life of transnational families by allowing them communicate easily across continents (Madianou & Miller, 2011), thus replacing traditional mail or phone booths for long-distance communication. Virtual co-presence uses hearing, writing and seeing to enhance family relationships across borders. A mobile phone with internet access grants the user the possibility to make telephone calls, Skype audio or video calls, to send SMS and photographs, to use messaging applications such as WhatsApp and Messenger, or to send images with Snapchat – to name but a few options. The advancement in ICT technologies over the past decade has afforded transnational families across the world a means of communication (Kędra, 2020) which is both economical and instantaneous. Miguel, who has a child in shared custody in Iceland and a teenage child living with his ex-partner abroad (as discussed above). retraces some of the history of long-distance communication during his time in Iceland. Ways to communicate transnationally have evolved since 2009, the year he settled in Iceland. He illustrates how a transnational parent needs to be up to date with ICT technologies to be able to communicate efficiently with his children, by explaining how he communicated with his son abroad from 2009 to the year of our interview (2018):

> When I came here to Iceland, for a few years maybe, you have to think that [there] was no WhatsApp or [anything]. So, yes, for several years it was phone calls. [There] was some problem with the communication [...], maybe it's kids. Kids on the phone, it's kind of like "Hi", "What are you doing?", "Hmm nothing", you know it's not like... you have to really push to get some information, and... Yeah, and drive them to tell you, it's like can you tell me this, or can you tell me [that], I don't know. And at some point it starts to be fluent in the conversation. When [my son] started to grow it was easier, but then again he grew into puberty, like a teenager you know, so now it's hard to talk to him on the phone. Yes, once in a while we Skype or hang out and stuff like that, but it is [easier] to communicate with him in a teenager way. WhatsApp or some Instagram, or... you have to be in new fashion, you cannot be in the old fashion.
>
> Stéphanie: Text is old fashion?
>
> Miguel: Yes totally (laughing). I don't know, like in a teenager way for example Snapchat. And I hate... I don't use Snapchat, but I know that if I send him a Snapchat I will get an immediate answer. If I send him a WhatsApp hmm [maybe], if I send him a text no, you have to evolve with him, you know. (Interview 32, male, outside Europe)

This excerpt indicates that in some cases, the ability and willingness of transnational parents to keep up with ICT technologies impacts the level and frequency of their communication with their children. If "older" forms of communication such as

postcards or phone calls are not totally obsolete, the ability to communicate through applications and social media guarantees parents a more efficient connection with their children, and possibly more insight into their children's lives. We can see that the use of images on Snapchat generates a better response from Miguel's son than other written media such as text messages. Some of the transnational parents speak to their children every day, mostly through applications like Skype or WhatsApp, although they admit it is harder with teenagers because they are "busy" and "always somewhere outside". The challenges of connecting with a teenager is not solely a challenge at a transnational level, as demonstrated by scholarship about teenagehood and families in general (Golsteijn & van den Hoven, 2013). However, not many transnational parents stated that contact with their teenage children abroad was regular and sustained. Instead, they said that it was 'difficult' and non-systematic. In interviews with migrant parents (rather than transnational parents) conducted for this project, many participants mentioned the regularity with which they spoke to family members abroad (siblings, parents or grandparents), whether it was once a week or everyday at a specific time.

(Mis)communication is a common occurrence in families, not only for teenagers but for various members of the kin network. Communication can be an issue for couples who experience separation for extended periods of time. Hannah has lived away from her partner Tryggvi for a year and discussed during an interview how she kept both a relationship between herself and Tryggvi as a married couple, and a relationship between the children and Tryggvi (their father). She explains how she recreated an established family routine so the children could speak to and see their father, and herself speak to her husband, on a daily basis:

> We basically spoke on WhatsApp all day long. When the kids woke up I would call him and the kids would talk to him before they went to school, and then I would talk to him after I dropped them off and see how he is doing. And then maybe at lunch time or something I would talk to him, and then after school, or bedtime. I always call him before bedtime. So definitely there's gonna be a call in the morning, before they go to school and before they go to bed, and basically I'll call him in the middle of that just to have a conversation just me and him. And then at night after the kids have gone to bed I usually call him. (Interview 36, female, outside Europe)

This sustained contact on the phone or on a video call is used to recreate the presence of the father. Hannah feels like this daily communication helped to provide a sense of normality in family life, and despite his physical absence, her partner and father of her children was always "here". During the interview, she said:

> [My friend] was worried about when we moved back, because apparently it can be hard, family reunification can be hard at the beginning. Like for families to be separated and to be back together, it can be hard on the

> relationship, takes some time to readjust, but I felt like I didn't go through a lot of that. And I don't know if it's because we talked all the time… the only things the kids are not getting are hugs and kisses, to be physically close, but they would talk to him, they would take the phone, each of them would take the phone and talk to him privately, you know what I mean? (Interview 36, female, outside Europe)

Hannah explains that maintaining virtual communication during physical absence has facilitated and sustained a sense of 'being family'. On the phone, they would share the moments that they used to share together: before the children went to school, at lunchtime, or before bedtime. The emotional connection remained the same, but the medium which was used was different as the family relied on co-presence rather than physical presence. Maintaining an emotional connection between parents and children is facilitated by communication technologies, on which many parents rely to (re)create the bond they have with their children. Viktor, a father from Europe who has never lived with his daughter "under the same roof", explains how their relationship has evolved over the years through the medium of Skype, which fulfils their emotional connection and has brought them closer together over the years:

> Viktor: I really miss her but in a way she learned that my longing and my curiosity and the need to be in touch with her is being fulfilled by the way we most communicate with each other. […] I always was a dad like… [a] Skype daddy. My daughter calls me Skype daddy.
>
> Stéphanie: What does that mean?
>
> Viktor [laughing]: Skype, because the most contact that we got is on Skype on the internet. […] Yeah Skype daddy. And you know when I was in [home country], I was visiting her, I always remembered about her birthday, and we spent some holidays together from time to time, or Christmas time or summer holidays, but our contact is always, you know… […] not typical contact, relationship between daughter and dad.
>
> Stéphanie: Yeah, yeah, I understand.
>
> Viktor: But we are very close still and probably now, we are, this is the closest years for us. Mentally we are very close now. (Interview 30, male, Central and Eastern Europe)

Viktor explains that the emotional connection he built over the years with his daughter is not impeded by communicating virtually. On the other hand, their relationship has flourished through Skype, a virtual medium. While he had to rely on the child's mother in early years to be in touch with his daughter, he no longer needs to because his daughter now has almost reached adulthood. Based on my interviews and building on what was said in the previous chapter, the relationship the parent holds with the child's

carer is extremely important to establish and maintain contact between transnational parents and children, especially if the children are too young to have their own means of communication, such as a mobile phone or a computer with email access. Divorced parents not only have to contend with distance, but they often rely on an ex-partner to preserve and perpetuate a (virtual) relationship with their children. For example, Martin's ex-wife monitors and effectively prevents their young daughter from receiving phone calls, mail or emails from her father living in Iceland. Angry and helpless because he cannot communicate with her, he demonstrates his care by sending alimony every month and saving for his daughter's future. For him, the lack of interaction is deeply troubling. Like most parents, he gives a new direction to his emotions by coming up with tangible actions he can accomplish for his child, such as sending or saving money.

Sustained communication and virtual co-presence with their children are important to transnational parents' sense of happiness in this study. They seek virtual co-presence which is an important aspect of their relationship with their children, and provides reassurance about the bond that they share. However, transnational parents contend that virtual co-presence is 'not the same' as physical co-presence, and they have a value system which places physical co-presence higher than other types of co-presence. Most of the transnational parents in this study enjoy virtual communication and co-presence, but they also long for a physical connection with their children. Viktor may be an exception because he seems very serene about his (geographically and physically) distant relationship with his daughter. As quoted above, he describes that 'longing' and 'curiosity' are being fulfilled through virtual communication. Viktor suggests that the way they communicate with each other (daily, openly, willingly) leaves no doubt about their affection for each other. Other transnational parents need to physically reconnect to reassure themselves and their children that they are still present, loving, and caring.

6.2 Physical co-presence

Physical co-presence is esteemed more highly than virtual co-presence (Baldassar, 2008), and is connected to ideas of emotional closeness. Unlike Viktor's experience described above, in which he explains that physical distance has not prevented him from building intimacy with his daughter over the years, Tatiana, who lives away from her teenage daughter, feels that a lack of physical distance has broken a special bond between herself and her daughter:

> We are not everyday together. We are just in touch like friends, in real. Of course we are telling each other that we love and miss [each other] and this and that but I cannot be there every time when she needs me. [...] I'm much closer emotionally with the small one because we are all the time together. It was this emotional connection... it was broken after these ten years. I cannot say that it is completely nothing, it is, but it is... not like

> it would be [if] I would be there. (Interview 27, female, Europe)

Tatiana feels that the lack of physical presence between herself and her daughter has made them 'friends' rather than parent and child. Her palpable disappointment at being far from her daughter echoes the story of her divorce and subsequent custody decision when she moved to Iceland:

> Tatiana: I was angry [towards the child's father] the first few years, that he didn't agree to let her [come] here, but after this court matter I had no... just no choice. I had to accept it [...] I had to accept it, because I had to be here [in Iceland]. Nobody would choose life for me, like her father will not decide where I will live because I have a child with him, so... I was thinking this way.
>
> Stéphanie: But you say she decided, your daughter, when she was small?
>
> Tatiana: She hasn't decided, she wanted to be here and she wanted to be there. So they took the decision, ok, if she has to be here or there. She didn't say, "ok, I want to be with my mother", if she said it like this they would probably decide that she will be. But she was seven years old, she didn't want to hurt me, she didn't want to hurt her father, so court just decided it [makes] no sense to change [country] for her. You know, she just stayed there... (Interview 27, female, Central and Eastern Europe)

Tatiana's feelings have been affected by events of the past during which her desires have been denied; although she wanted her daughter to come with her in Iceland, the court gave custody to Tatiana's ex-partner. She did not want to be far away from her daughter, but she had to be. Reflecting on their years of separation, Tatiana concludes that:

> After these ten years, I cannot say it was a bad decision on them [the court] or something. It was hard, but... she's okay there, she's very good in school, she's a very good person and everything is okay, we have good communication and relation. And it's just like that. (Interview 27, female, Central and Eastern Europe)

Tatiana carefully avoids talking about her own emotions to insist on the fact that her daughter is fine, and that the decision did not impact her in any negative way, as she seems to have grown into a fine and sensible young person. Instead, she talks about the very privileged life she is leading in Iceland, with a good job where she is independent ('nobody is telling me what I have to do') and has lots of free time. I sense that she has learned to deal with the disappointment of not living with her daughter ('it's just like that'), but that she needs to spend a lot of time with her. Even though Tatiana could not stay in her home country and had to come to Iceland, she cannot stand to

stay for long without her daughter. Tatiana makes her resentment for her home country and its mentality clear, and explains that she would 'maybe' come back once every five years if she did not have a child in the country. Instead, she goes at least twice a year to visit her daughter. The emotional pain of separation may have encouraged strong attachment to Iceland and the life she is living there. Leaving her daughter behind was a huge sacrifice, and she seems to rationalise it somehow by making sure that her daughter is fine, and that her life in Iceland does not allow for regrets. When she says she 'had to accept it because she had to be here [in Iceland]', she knows that she will have to make a path for herself to downplay the negative emotions of separation. Instead, she focuses of her own resilience and on what she has been able to accomplish in Iceland. By living a 'good life' in Iceland and by having the means to be co-present with her daughter several times a year, including a lengthy period during summer, she is alleviating some of the pain and regret she experiences. For Tatiana, the various interactions between longings and emotions such as guilt or disappointment are synthetised into an overall sense that life is going well. Moreover, there is no strong disconnection between Tatiana's expectations of life in Iceland before she moved and the life she managed to make for herself there. While she is separated from her eldest daughter, she enjoys a comfortable, peaceful and flexible lifestyle. She has been able to keep her independence and make her own choices, which was what she expected when she came to settle in the country. For other parents, the disconnection between expectations and reality has resulted in great disappointment, as exemplified below.

For other transnational parents, and particularly the divorced fathers participating in the study, physical presence was already not achievable in their country of origin because of custody arrangements, which in some cases had even prompted their migration to Iceland. When his ex-wife moved 1000 kilometres away from their hometown with their son, Miguel was no longer in a position to visit him on a regular basis and spent at least seven months without seeing him. A friend of his who was already working in Iceland was able to travel home twice a year. Miguel recalls:

> Every time [my friend visited from Iceland, it was with] a lot of money, [or] what [I thought] was a lot of money. I was like… okay, if I'm not going to see my son living in [my home country], but [my friend] is able to come twice a year… I think I will be able to see him more [if I live and work in Iceland]." (Interview 28, male, outside Europe)

The logic later collapsed, but it is the appeal of physical co-presence which led him to take the decision to leave his home country and move to Iceland. Quickly upon arrival, Miguel realised that his expectations had been unreasonable, and that he would not be able to visit his son as often as he thought. Miguel seems to have made relative peace with this decision, although it has caused him great emotional pain. Another father blames the custody decision and the consequences of physical distance for denying him the possibility to be "a real father". The argument resonates with virtual co-

presence, somehow not as 'real' as physical co-presence for most transnational parents in the study. As Martin recalls the story of an "unfortunate turn-up" of events leading to unemployment, divorce and the absence of his daughter, he has tears in his eyes. He has found a lifeline during a severe economic crisis, fought for custody, followed the court's order and, although he initially did not want to, has moved to Iceland to "provide for [his] child". After a court order was issued to him in his country of origin, he is allowed to see his daughter three times a year, during Christmas, Easter and half of the summer holidays. His anger and sense of injustice are strong, and he seems to see the court's decision as part of a pattern of bias towards mothers in custody battles:

> The women always take full custody, just like that, we guys have to fight for it. And it doesn't matter if the woman is an alcoholic, or if she's a drug-addict, or she's mentally challenged, you've got to be in charge of proving it. (Interview 29, male, Central and Eastern Europe)

This argument echoes another father's account during another interview:

> I think it's like everywhere. The law will always support the mother over the father. You have to say that in order to have the custody, for example me, in order to have the custody of my son, I would have to prove like she was smoking crack, or she was a whore... something super bad that I could say okay, then she loses the custody and I would get it, it's not possible. The law always goes with the mom. [...] At some point I say we split the custody 50/50, which in Iceland is 49/51, yes... so I get of course 49. (Interview 32, male, outside Europe)

The divorced fathers of this study, living transnationally, have to contend with court orders and the mother's willingness not to interfere in the father and child relationship. This brings despair and pain to their lives in Iceland, and they can feel powerless to change the situation. As shown elsewhere in this study, mothers are still considered as the primary nurturer for the child (Símonardóttir, 2016), often relegating fathers to take the role of second-class parent. Sometimes, both mothers and fathers enable themselves to embody these roles. Other times these roles of primary and secondary nurturers or carers are contested, as exemplified here by Martin and Miguel. These fathers aspire to have egalitarian parental roles and realise that geographical distance comes in the way of this ideal. They try to circumscribe these situations by finding other ways to maintain their bond with their children. They often explained that they feel deprived of the possibility of physically "being there" and oppose it by "being here" – financially, emotionally, or through virtual or imagined scenarios.

6.3 Proxy co-presence

Proxy co-presence occurs with the existence of objects and photographs which embody the presence of the absent person (Baldassar, 2008). We can also argue that proxy co-

presence includes parcels and gifts, which may serve the same purpose. The practice of sending parcels from abroad is a well-established phenomenon in certain countries, like the Balikbayan Box in the Philippines which is a token of relatives' affection and care for family members living abroad (Patzer, 2018). Transnational parents also send gifts to their children, or go on shopping trips with them when they visit, and the items bought can serve as reminders of a parent's love and attention (McKay, 2018; 2007).

Tatiana's apartment is full of pictures of her daughter, and significant relationships or moments are framed: one photograph depicts her daughter and herself standing in front of Big Ben in London; another one is of the two of them during her daughter's Confirmation, or on holidays together. Tatiana is one of the few parents in the study who can afford to visit her daughter several times a year for extended periods of time, and it is clear that she cherishes those moments spent together. Numerous photographs are also kept on mobile phones, which are therefore both virtual and proxy objects. Proxy co-presence may also include memories, and we have seen in the previous chapter parents' attitudes during transnational visits, as some of them want to transform the time together into an unforgettable experience. Transnational parents use a body of words reminding us of touristic campaigns to 'make memories' or live the 'experience of a lifetime'. The goal of such encounters is to create a lasting impression in their children's mind, and to create memories to remember and cherish. Memory is an important family-making practice. In this study, the parent/child relationship is constituted by visits and communication, but also by thoughts and recollections of past events or past actions. Across the world, families and family identities are constituted by memory. Photographs, text messages, and memories are processes of identification that occurs within families (Roberts, 2012). Memories are there to make and to hold on to, as exemplified by several parents in this study. Martin exclaims that despite his lack of sustained communication with his daughter, 'she still remembers every detail from our last visit about three years ago'. Here, memory can be constitutive of the love between a parent and his child. Intangible family practices of remembering and forming memories is consequential in the parent/child transnational relationship, and the making of the family can occur through the medium of memory or imagination.

6.4 Imagined co-presence

Imagining the presence of the absent child is prominent in transnational parents' narratives. During the interviews, several participants indulged in fantasies about time spent together with their children in the future, as exemplified by the following three examples:

> Miguel: I always have hope that something… I never lost […] the hope that eventually [he] could move with me. […] I always have that hope [that] he could move, or he could stay. (Interview 32, male, outside Europe)

> Tatiana: I was offering the other to come here for study. Maybe she will

> just come here and live here. [...] For me it would be great if she would come. (Interview 27, female, Central and Eastern Europe)
>
> Abel: Actually yesterday me and [friends name] went to the waterfalls [...]. Like I say I was face timing them, yesterday you know at the waterfall and they were like 'Wow... We need to come there' and all that stuff. [...] Actually they both want to come and live with me, so... I'm going to bring them here hopefully in September. [...] I just want them to come. (Interview 31, male, Southern Europe)

These excerpts demonstrate that a reunion with their children remains in the mind of transnational parents, who fantasise about physical presence and the physical closeness they may share with their children in the future. Cangià and Zittoun (2020) argue that imaginaries are an integral part of mobility processes, and that mobility triggers imagination (and vice-versa). Migrants' imaginations are full of promises and potential, and flows of imagined episodes and futures occupy several of the narratives of my interviewees. The creative character of imagination can support and validate mobility choices (*ibid*.), as mobilities are often prompted by imaginations of *what could be*. Similarly, family life is also enabled by imagination, as parents contemplate moments in which their children are co-present. Just like memories, imagination helps to maintain and recreate family relationships.

Imagination signifies longing, and Skrbiš (2008) argues that transnational emotional experiences are guided by absence and longing, not by co-presence. I argue that longing is embodied in *co-present imaginations,* which constitute an important process within the emotional experience of transnational parents. As seen in the examples above, transnational parents in this study recreate the presence of their child through imagined narratives and potential futures. As parents visualise their next stay with their children, in which they will go shopping together, watch television or enjoy a holiday abroad, imagination takes the form of symbolic family-making. The hypothetical future and the hypothetical self both support family making practices. Being together and doing together are an important part of transnational parents' imaginaries and allow for symbolic family-making when physical family-making seems difficult to achieve.

Acknowledging longing as an emotion that uses imagination to allow symbolic family-making reduces inequalities of class and gender in transnational families. If transnational practices and visits differ according to parents' means and capabilities, every individual holds the capacity to imagine. Planning the future or dreaming are within reach of anyone and understanding longing as care can circumvent overcritical accounts of absence in transnational family research. Absence as a physical or emotional experience is counteracted through imaginary accounts of presence or care, even if the parents in this study do not have the same dreams or desires. Martin saving money for his daughter's university years serves many functions at once. Not only does he imagine the potentiality of the future, but he manifests his attachment and care in the

present, even if his daughter remains unaware of this practice. Money-saving serves as a symbolic care practice produced by the father's imagination. Conceiving their children moving to come and live with them expresses their parents' love and care; the potential given by their imagination embodies their sense of care and obligation.

Waiting for a visa for oneself or a family member denies families a prospective future, as they often have no idea how long their request will take. The same goes for citizenship, which holds the promise of the future; many migrants depend on it for various endeavours they aspire to, such as family reunification or mobility to other European countries. A participant, who comes from a country outside the European Union, is hoping to get Icelandic citizenship which would allow him to pursue other opportunities in Europe:

> I don't know exactly when, because I will not go to [other European country] if I don't have my citizenship. Maybe I... well actually I said yesterday at work that I would like to take a month and a half off. I will go to [other European country] on vacation, I cannot work, because I am still a [non-European] citizen, I can only go as a tourist and I cannot work. I could do some black work, but it doesn't represent reality you know. If I move there my goal is not to work in black, you know. It's to have some stable job... so, yes to go and [...] to see how is [other European country], for a month and a half, not one week. To evaluate a lot of things and see. (Interview 28, male, outside Europe)

This father would like to move to a European country in the near future, but is worried about his financial and material prospects if he does without securing Icelandic citizenship first; the latter would allow him easy access to employment and other benefits in a EU country. This participant also worries about not being able to visit his children, or vice-versa. For family members waiting (or hoping) for family reunification, the uncertainty of the bureaucratic process disrupts imagination, as it holds up the potentiality of reunification and *what could be*. The disastrous emotional effect of uncertainty and waiting in migration has been covered at length by academic scholarship (Janeja & Bandak, 2018). Immigration bureaucracy hinders migrants' imagination and the possibility of imagined co-presence with their families, and the indefinite wait in matters of family reunification or citizenship applications negatively affects their emotional experience. The comfort and reassurance brought by imagination and the potentiality of the future becomes an infirmity. As one of the participants, Hannah, explained:

> You don't know what's happening because there's no... Like you know "I know by this time I will be in [country]", it was nothing like that. It was just up in the air so it was like, you know *there's nothing to look forward to* [AR/My emphasis], you don't know if it's gonna be in a month or in a year or two years like [laughs], you know. (Interview 36, female, outside Europe)

The potential of the future and imagination can also serve as bandages to alleviate some negative emotional experiences. If digital practices bring joy and comfort, they can also prompt less pleasant emotions such as guilt, a common feeling among migrant and transnational families (Baldassar, 2015). During the interview, Martin scrolls through a series of text messages sent to his daughter, displeased over the lack of response. However, showing me the numerous messages he sent seems to show me that he fulfils his moral obligation towards her, or tries to as much as she will allow him. In the interview, he said: "I've done some mistakes, maybe I wasn't there when she needed me or... I didn't turn up as the best father in the world, but I'm trying and I will try." In transnational parents' stories, guilty narratives often come coupled with the idea of redemption. Miguel says that his son coming to live with him would alleviate his feeling of guilt, and he incorporates ideas about redeeming his "mistakes" while planning for the future. This redemption takes the form of more visits and physical presence with his children, although he remains cautious in imagining the future: "what can I achieve, you know?". In imagining that they are reunited with their children, it is hope which is at play as a powerful emotional tool that can allow parents to fill the gap that was left by the absence of their children.

6.5 Transnational parental affect

Knowing that their children are well and in good hands at home allows some participants to remove some of the guilt or bad feelings they have about parental separation. It was clear from many of the interviews that alternative parental figures are important to ensure that their children are receiving proper care and affection. Talking about her daughter living with her father and his wife, Tatiana mentions that her child "didn't feel" her absence because her father's wife is "like a mother for her". It echoes Nadia's account as she recalls that in her country, "it happens between sisters than their children just feel that she is their mom, and my sister is like his second mom." However, it did not prevent her from feeling bad when her son refused to come with her when she moved to Iceland. Nadia was feeling unsettled because she had planned her move to Iceland thinking her son would go with her, but at the end said she should go ahead, and he would join when she was settled. This situation created a lot of grief for her, because he initially refused to move, until he finally decided to join her. Maternal grief is probably amplified by socio-cultural norms and ideas about the importance of the mother as the primary carer for the child. This idea is well-illustrated by an excerpt from Nadia's interview, where she explains that only a mother can satisfy some of the needs of a child:

> I think it is just much better for him to live with his mother and his sister here, not anyone can give him what I am giving to him. Not his father, not anyone in [country]. So that's why I was pretty sure that he would come, even if it might take a long time. Because he lived with me for a long time, he is a bit shy to ask his father or his stepmother to maybe buy him

> something, or do something for him, so even when he was in [country] he was calling me and saying "please mom can you buy me this", I said please ask your father to do that, but he was a little bit... not afraid but shy that he usually did not choose to do this. He was with me and that is why I thought yes, he would come here because he feels more secure and safe here, with me. (Interview 33, female, outside Europe)

Distance does not hold the same meaning for everyone. One father thinks that "the distance is nothing to [him]" because he can take a plane and be with his family within a few hours, as he has both the means and the flexibility to do so. Another laments the fact that he can only see his son every two years. Social disparities and financial means impact transnational parents' emotional experience since they are not all able to provide equal amounts of time, visits, gifts or remittances. Resources and opportunities are unequally distributed within transnational families, highlighting the need to take into consideration broader societal factors to understand their experiences.

Transnational parents are given the same chances to *care about*, but face inequalities in *caring for* their children and families. *Caring for* requires having the means to care for someone, and the narratives of the participants emphasise much more the parental work of *caring about*. Tatiana discusses relationships and sexuality with her teenage daughter over the phone, and Miguel takes the time to talk through a school problem with his son until they find a solution. However, as already discussed in Chapter 5, it can be harder for the parents of younger children as communication and connection can be more difficult to achieve -although parents also mentioned that communication with teenagers was not the easiest. Viktor recalls it took him many years to create an emotional connection with his daughter:

> She wasn't able to produce in me deep emotions, I mean, I was worried about her, I liked the talks with her [but] I knew they never last long and they're not deep. Those are the contacts with little kids and that was a special little kid for me but she hadn't been creating in me any deep emotions. And after being 12 years old she showed character. She gained character and she started a little too early to do things which I could normally attribute to teenagers, but not 12 year old kids. Let's say that 14, 16, 17 years old teens are undermining the authorities, they are looking their own way, they want to be the authority for themselves, establish something, gain their own value, etc., their self-esteem, they're shaping those basic things and she somehow started earlier and by doing this she focused all my attention on her and we started to get to know each other closer. She stopped being a child to me and started to be a human. [An] interesting human, you know. (Interview 30, male, Central and Eastern Europe)

Viktor manifests that the constitution of emotions between transnational parents and

their children is not always innate, nor immediate or permanent. His emotions towards his daughter have been fluid and changeable and reflect the various 'shapes' that family relationships can take in space and time.

This chapter demonstrates that presence -whichever form it may take – and communication are essential to sustain a transnational parent-child relationship and to convey affection and love from afar. Technological developments have been of tremendous importance for kin relations across borders and have allowed family members to connect with their loved ones quickly and often through messaging, call and video applications. These technologies allow for virtual presence and facilitate the creation of greater bonds and intimacy between transnational parents and their children, and the use of ICT have allowed to decrease the emotional suffering of parents living apart from their children. Information and Communication Technologies have permitted transnational families to redefine their everyday by allowing instantaneous and continuous exchanges that can simulate co-presence. Virtual presence has become an important part of migrant and transnational family lives, and individuals living apart value the opportunities to engage with their loved ones digitally. However, many transnational parents in this research continue to hierarchise the different types of presence and discuss co-presence as the ideal form of family interaction. Most transnational parents hope for co-presence with their children, as demonstrated by their hope and dreams to be reunited in the future. Imaginaries, hopes, and dreams are useful narratives to take into consideration when discussing emotion and migration since they can help us elucidate the feelings transnational parents have for their children. Beyond the latter, hope is also a powerful account of migrants' aspirations and expectations and can clarify the role of these expectations in how happiness is understood and constructed by individuals who decide to migrate.

This chapter has examined different types of (co)presence which are constitutive of transnational parents' emotions of missing and longing. Virtual co-presence and communication is important and recreates a sense of the everyday between parents and their children. Physical co-presence creates emotions of longing and guilt and the burden of the absence of the children is eased if the child is cared for by another parent or a responsible and affectionate adult. The consequences of proxy co-presence are somewhat limited in the chapter, even if the importance of photographs and memorabilia is clear. Finally, imagined co-presence is an essential part of the participants' lives, as they dream and envision a future where their children are close to them -both physically and emotionally. These different types of presence are constructed through the lens of distance and absence, that transnational parents attempt to bridge. The equilibrium between absence and presence speaks to the balancing act required when one lives here and away: migrant and transnational parents are exposed to two cultures, and they reject and incorporate certain socio-cultural elements in their lives -both from their own culture and from their host culture. How does one deal with the diversity present in their lives, and what are the emotional implications for the family and the parent child relationship?

7 Transnational parenting and diversity

When they move to Iceland, migrant and transnational parents are exposed to different parenting practices and ideologies, which they may reject or incorporate into their own parenting practices. Experiencing cultural shifts in parenting practices is a common occurrence for migrant parents across the world (Bendixsen & Danielsen, 2019), since native-born and foreign-born parents can hold contested understandings of proper parenting and childhood ideals (Hollekim et al., 2016). Several parents participating in this research have trouble understanding Icelandic parenting values and find it difficult to reconcile their own parenting style with Icelandic parenting. In this chapter I examine how the migrant parents in our study accommodate their parenting views with the broader parenting and education practices in Iceland, and how this affect their sense of wellbeing. Transnationalism implies disconnection from some ideologies and values and reconnection with others. In the context of parenting, this often leads to challenges to migrant parents' happiness because having difficulties in incorporating new parenting practices or ideals can make them feel inadequate parents in their host countries (Barn et al., 2015). The objective of the chapter is to observe how migrant parents reconcile their parenting beliefs and childhood values with those of the host country. This chapter discusses parenting styles, ideologies and practices from the point of view of migrant parents who live in Iceland. It explores the main themes of contention drawn from the interviews about their comparison of raising children "here" and "there": (lack of) discipline and childcare. As school is an important site to getting to know the child rearing practices for migrant parents, the focus is to a large extent on their perception of education in Icelandic primary schools. The chapter starts by an introduction recounting Ciara's experience and opinion of Icelandic upbringing, leading to a discussion on parenting norms and styles in Iceland. Then, I discuss migrant parents' opinions on childcare arrangements in the country and I finish by exploring their attitudes and feelings toward education and teaching in primary schools.

Ciara is an South European mother living in Reykjavík. She has spent many years living abroad, first alone as a young woman, then with her partner and with their son. At the time of the interview, Ciara has been in Iceland for one year and a half, alone with her son. She has been waiting for her partner's visa application to be approved so he could join them in Iceland. In the excerpt below, Ciara discusses understandings of parenting between her home country and Iceland. She explains that it is unthinkable for her to raise her child in her home country because of irreconcilable differences between the modern parental mindset and her own; however, she is also displeased with parental behaviour in Iceland. When discussing these differences, she said:

> It does me good to see my son happy like this but [...] I don't know, it's complicated. [...]
>
> I would not want my child to grow up there [in my home country] for now. Maybe in the future... I am not sure [why], I don't like the new generation over there, modern parents, I am afraid he will end up in schools learning things that aren't a part of what I would like to give him. Even here in Iceland I have this problem, because I share nothing with... I don't agree with anything that parents do with children here. [...] But what is really shocking to me, it is that here, most of the time, it is children who are in charge. Children have more power over parents. It is as if parents were scared to face the... how can I say... agitated [character] of their children, and rather than impose themselves and make the child understand who is in charge, they themselves... how to say, they are submissive, and they let the child do whatever he wants, and I can't stand that. [...] Because the child must understand the role of the parent and his role as a child. I am not sure if I can explain this, if I manage to explain it correctly... [...] So yes it shocks me a little, and even if my child hangs out with Icelandic children, and sees how Icelandic people live, I can see he's got a sort of [home country] upbringing. I could never imagine my child having a fit in a supermarket because he wants something that I don't want to buy him. (laughs) I cannot imagine this, and here I see that all the time, children on the floor... I don't know, it shocks me a little. It makes me understand that parents here are not... I am not sure how to say, hard, I can say this. But at the same time, here there is this culture, we do not [go hard on] the children, you have to talk to them, so I am also sometimes afraid to be rigid, because here they could misinterpret a way to educate a child, and understand it as something who isn't right, and create problems. (Interview 35, female, Southern Europe)

The happiness of her child sits uneasily with Ciara because it goes hand in hand with parenting practices and an education model she disapproves of. She perceives Icelandic parenting to be 'soft' and thinks that the 'power' in the parent-child relationship is attributed to the children. Hollekim et al. (2016) demonstrated that in Norway, where the perspective on childhood and parenting is similar to that in Iceland, the ideals for upbringing and child-rearing goals prioritise individuality, independence, creativity, and happiness. In contrast, values like conformity, obedience, and an emphasis on 'hard work' are less emphasized. However, the Icelandic childhood ideals are contrasting with Ciara's own childhood goals which emphasise respect for authority, discipline and obedience. Growing up in an authoritarian household, Ciara is rather critical of Icelandic parenting as she understands it, because she would not want her child to embrace goals, values or beliefs which are not her own. Wherever they are in the world, parents want their children to be happy, but they also have strong

expectations about their children's competence and future. Children should reflect the parents' values and beliefs. It is most obvious in section 7.3 in this chapter, where parents enjoy the fact that their children are happy in school, but express concern that happiness does not seem to accompany educational effort and academic achievement. There is more to children's happiness than 'feeling happy', as migrant parents in this study worry about their children's socio-cultural competencies, their education, and their future opportunities. Migrant parents recognise that their children being happy is important, but they also want them to be confident, adequately educated, and ready to face the challenges of the world. Happiness alone is insufficient, incompatible with the contemporary world. It is too simplistic (and inaccurate) to say that children's happiness is all a parent needs to feel happy themselves. Rather, achieving family happiness, when all the desires and needs of various individuals are met, is a more realistic way to think about emotions and happiness in the family. Examining parenting styles and practices allows us to understand migrant and transnational family choices and to understand the delicate balance between individual and family happiness. After discussing parenting styles, I delve into the contentious issue of childcare in early years, and conclude by exploring migrant parents' views on Icelandic schools.

7.1 Discipline and freedom

I am checking in at a guesthouse in Reykjavík to attend an event organised by the University of Iceland. A friendly and loquacious member of staff starts chatting to me and we begin to share our experiences of living in Iceland. Gabriela is from Central Europe and moved to Iceland with her husband and child. Not long after starting preschool, their child started causing problems for the teachers and acting 'wild', according to her mother's own words, so Gabriela and her husband decided to send her to live with her grandmother in their home country. Under the watch of her grandmother, her parents expect her to learn to behave appropriately. The idea that children who are brought up in Iceland develop 'wilder' personalities than they would 'at home' resonates with a few migrant parents I spoke with in my study.

As in other Nordic countries, Icelandic parenting is 'child-focused and dialogue based' (Hollekim et al., 2016, p.54). According to a study by Einarsdóttir (2010), when it comes to education, Icelandic parents expect their children to enjoy themselves and learn self-reliance and respect and have been described as permissive or indulgent parents. Other types of parenting include authoritative, authoritarian and neglectful (Baumrind, 1989; 1967). Both indulgent and authoritative parents may be nurturing and encouraging, but the latter use power and discipline to encourage good behaviour (ibid.). Discipline can be understood both as a positive set of principles for learning and personal development, and as a negative synonym for restraint and punishment (ibid.). Unsurprisingly, conversations about parenting styles occur more often with parents who live with their children in Iceland than with the participants who have their children in their country or origin, since they need to contend with potential differences

in parental styles and behaviours between their home countries and Iceland. The idea that Icelandic upbringing is free of restraint and therefore lacking in discipline compared to country of origin is a common opinion amongst migrant parents in this research, as exemplified by the excerpt at the beginning of the chapter and the opinion of this mother of three:

> The [Icelandic parents] let [the children] do a lot of things. Or at least they don't say no to nothing, it seems to me. I would say it's a state of mind. We [in our family,] do not want our kids to do a lot of things but on the other hand they are more Icelandic, they do not listen to us [laughing]. (Interview 22, female, Central and Eastern Europe)

Despite not being fond of Icelandic upbringing (as she describes it), and the fact that both she and her partner are immigrants, this mother explains how Icelandicness permeates her children's character and personality. The prominent interest in children (and parenthood) in Iceland, mirroring the close-knit and family-centred character of Icelandic society (Digoix, 2015), is often understood by the migrant parents as the supremacy of children's will and interests over that of their parents. Several participants from European countries say in interviews that they do not see restraint as being a part of Icelandic upbringing and education, and this sits uneasily with their own understanding of how to raise children, in which children are expected to follow their parents' wishes and obey their commands. For one father, Roman, a father of two from Central Europe, upbringing in Iceland is described as "very loose, so the kids do what they want, there's no discipline". Another father from Central Europe describes his daughter by saying that she was "irresponsible, basically [she could] do what she wanted", reinforcing the idea that children in Iceland (be)come untamed and unpredictable. These quotes echo the thoughts of many of the migrant parents who consider that Icelandic upbringing is permissive and indulgent, and many were quick to add that this parenting style was not acceptable to them. Several participants I spoke with, in particular those from Central and Eastern European countries, argue for a more authoritarian approach to children's upbringing. On the other hand, there were also other migrant parents who enjoy the indulgent parenting style in Iceland.

Bi-national couples, who include one Icelandic parent and one foreign parent, have to find ways to compromise between their different parenting styles. Migrant parents of this study living with an Icelandic partner tended to be less critical of Icelandic parenting than the other participants. Those migrant parents who embrace Icelandic styles of upbringing, comprised primarily of parents in binational couples with one Icelandic spouse, do not lament the lack of restraint and discipline but focus on the freedom and independence it gives children and cherish it highly. For these parents, witnessing an Icelandic upbringing leads them to reconsider the education they were given and the education they want to give their children. They enjoy what they describe as the respectful and cooperative relationships adults seem to have with children in

Iceland. Parents who are happy to leave behind the authoritative and authoritarian upbringing of their home country say that they enjoy the sympathy and encouragement they claim is shown to children in Iceland, as they measure their distance from parenting styles in their home countries. Tatiana, for example, explains the benefits of having moved away from authoritative/authoritarian parenting to indulgent parenting:

> And here children at home are listening [to] 'you are great, you can do this, you will be great', just motivating children and telling [them] you can do this, but in [my home country] at home children are... listening just to, 'you are stupid, he's doing better than you, why you are not doing this way, like he, he is much better, you are just an idiot', and it is in many houses like this. Children are... it is another culture. Maybe not a lower culture but another kind of culture, and I don't... when I was living there it was just normal. But when I came here I saw it was different, and I stopped to like it. I don't want to go to friends and hear that he was beating [his] child because he did this or that. It is not everybody I'm [talking about], but it is in most [households from my country] [...] Children have to be in a room, sit quietly, if not the father is just shouting. It is this kind of culture in [my home country]. (Interview 27, female, Central and Eastern Europe)

Moving away from an authoritarian style of upbringing was great for Tatiana, who enjoys what she perceives as the Icelandic approach of positive parenting. For her, this respectful upbringing allows every child to have their strengths recognised, and to be encouraged in all their endeavours. She is convinced that this type of education helps children to grow confident and happy. For other parents, a bit more nuance is welcome in their parenting. While they want their children to feel good and happy, they cannot disassociate parenting style and childhood goals from the demands of adult life. They consider that the freedom that comes with parenting in Iceland do not prepare children adequately to face the future.

7.2 Childcare versus stay-at-home parents

Another area of contention between life in Iceland in comparison to the country of origin is childcare, and the appropriate age for children to leave their parents to be taken care of by a professional childminder or at a school. In Iceland, recent decades have seen concerted efforts to increase the possibility of combining family life and labour market participation. Such efforts are reflected in the parental law of 2021 which provides new fathers with a non-transferable paternal leave of four and a half months. This is in addition to the non-transferable maternal leave of four and a half months for mothers, and an additional three months to be shared between mother and father as they wish. In Iceland, 90% of fathers make use of their parental leave, both Icelandic born and immigrants (Gíslason & Símonardóttir, 2018; Arnalds et al, 2013). Between 1

and 2 years of age, many Icelandic children go to dagforeldrar, literally 'day parents' (often employed in its feminine form dagmamma, 'day mum'), where they spend the day while their parents work. At two years old, sometimes earlier in schools located in the countryside, children start kindergarten (*leikskóli*, literally 'play school'), where they generally stay for four years until they go to primary school at about six years old. Care with a *dagmamma* and at the kindergarten are both subsidised by Icelandic municipalities, and although it is not free it is affordable by most families, with a cost of around 55 000 ISK (340 euros) for full-time care at a *dagmamma*, and 30 000 ISK (180 euros) for full-time kindergarten (Reykjavíkurborg, 2022).

There is virtually no stay-at-home culture for parents in Iceland, with only 225 children between 2 and 5 years old across the country not enrolled in preschool institutions in 2022 (Statistics Iceland, 2022). This is challenging for parents who come from countries where staying at home with your child for a few years is the tacit rule, or for parents who decide that this is what they want to do. In this study, several parents are unsympathetic to the use of a childminder from an early age, as exemplified by Elina, a mother of three who considers that a child should stay home for the first three years:

> I would not put my kid in some *dagmamma*. I do not like this system at all. No. I don't think it's good to place a small kid, less than one year, with somebody else, and you are working to get money to pay somebody else to take care of your kid. Of course, I was going often with [youngest] to playgrounds where there was *dagmammas*, just to be in contact with other kids. I think some people would prefer to stay at home, they just can't because of the money. [...] For me the *dagmamma*, just putting your kid somewhere when the kid starts to walk, starts to talk, you are just missing a lot. I would not like somebody else to teach my kids to talk. [...] What is really strange for me is to see young teachers, teaching two-year-old kids, having their own kids somewhere else, with a *dagmamma* or at another *leiksskóli*. I don't understand why you are teaching other kids [and] not being with your own. (Interview 22, female, Central and Eastern Europe)

This strong judgment of Icelandic ways causes a lot of pain for Elina, as she cannot fathom the idea of leaving a young child with a carer. Moreover, she feels isolated because she is one of the only stay-at-home mothers in her area. The use of a *dagmamma* from an early age is rooted in the Icelandic work culture and attempts to forge a gender-equal way of life, where men and women are encouraged to work as soon as their parental leave ends (Arnalds et al., 2013). During the interview, Elina went on to explain that this practice is acceptable if it allows parents to choose whether they want to stay at home with their children or instead go back to work. However, she finds unacceptable that the state does not support the choice of parents who would like to take care of their toddler longer:

> I think you should have the possibility to stay at home, but you shall have the possibility to go to work if you feel like that. If you want to continue to work, or work earlier, you shall be allowed to without any pressure, just be able to go there and work, if you feel like it's important for you. But if you decide you want to be at home you should be supported somehow. It's important. [Here women are supported] into going back to work. (Interview 22, female, Central and Eastern Europe)

In Iceland, parents can decide in principle to stay-at-home with their children, but the state does not support it financially beyond the 12-month combined parental leave. For most migrant parents I spoke with, staying at home with a young child is unaffordable after the parental leave; both parents are usually required to work to make ends meet, not to mention the social stigma that accompanies stay-at-home parents. Moreover, Icelandic families often have the support of grandparents or other relatives, while most migrant parents in this research do not. Another mother, Celena, shares her view on stay-at-home parents and preschool childcare. Celena is a woman from outside Europe who has four children with an Icelandic man she met fifteen years ago. Her family has been living in Iceland on and off, and at the time of the interview they have been living for four consecutive years in the country. After having children, Celena chose to be a stay-at-home mom until her kids were at least in primary school. Celena concurs with the view that cultural and social pressure pushes Icelandic mothers back to work when they do not necessarily feel that it is the best choice for them or their children.

> I heard a lot of stories where moms originally feel that [they'd] like to stay home with [their] child. But then they get to two or three years old, or two years old rather, and they really feel the pressure, either from themselves or from outside, or because it is just hard. If you don't have any other network of other moms staying at home, then of course you feel "what am I going to do? My child is getting bored". (Interview 9, female, outside Europe)

This mother feels very strongly about staying at home with her children for as long as she can, but she also experiences a lot of loneliness. Other parents are working, and there are no other families with children who can meet in the week to socialise. The loneliness also stems from Celena' perceived lack of understanding and possible judgment from other parents and families. She thinks that most people around her do not really understand nor approve of a mother staying at home with her children for several years. While some migrant parents want to stay at home longer to take care of their children, other migrant parents welcome the Icelandic system of supporting parents back to work, as they struggled with staying at home with their new-borns. For example, Nina, a mother from Western Europe who has been living in Iceland for ten years and has two children with an Icelandic partner, said:

> [During maternity leave] I was a little bit lost, I remember that. I didn't feel quite well because of course if you are at home you miss your self-esteem and I was thinking "I'm just a foreigner here". [...] I didn't want to [stay at home], at that time. [...] I wanted a suitable job. I was in a little bit of a crisis at that time. [...] I found out that just motherhood was not for me. I have friends who are happy to be at home, but it is not the kind of life I prefer. And those six months at home, I couldn't enjoy that time. Of course, I love my [child], I wasn't depressive or anything like that, but just with a kid who is not talking to me... that was not the surroundings I would like to have. I was so happy I got the job and got the possibility to work from 8 to 16, it was not a problem. [...] Today it would be nice to stay at home for six months and enjoy my older kids, but at that point I didn't enjoy it and I couldn't wait to go back to work. I have to admit that, and I went to work 100% again. (Interview 11, female, Western Europe)

Nina appreciated the long maternity leave but she felt that staying at home with her child the first six months of her life was detrimental to her sense of self and her sense of worth. Being at home with a young child accentuated her feeling of being 'other'. This sense of isolation prompted Elina, another mother from Central Europe, to delve into a comparison of motherhood in her home country and Iceland. She discusses the way she sees motherhood in her home country and in Iceland, and describes behaviours from mothers in both countries:

> I think there is some difference, because for us having kids is changing your life, you are not going to parties, you're just at home taking care of your kid... you have to block your life somehow, it's really, I would say, rare that you go to the cinema by yourself within those three years. You are taking care of your baby, you are not going to parties on Fridays... you just change your life. (Interview 22, female, Central and Eastern Europe)

Elina explains that in her own parenting, the desire of the self is repressed to attend to the needs of the young child. She holds a discourse very reproving of Icelandic mothers who may choose to focus both on the needs of their children and on their own needs. Elina's discourse denies a certain type of moral value to Icelandic mothers and produces categories of othering and difference 'in terms of whose lifestyle appears to be decent and good' (Berg & Petola, 2015, p.36). Berg and Petola's findings shed light on the deeply normative nature of some of these views. The normativity in Elina's discourse tends to portray gender and parenting roles as neutral and natural. By doing so, her narrative gives such views an assumed universality, as if they were inherent and unchangeable aspects of motherhood across the world. Another mother, Celena, explains that it is the socio-cultural pressure that pushes women to 'break that bond' early between children and mothers:

> You go away on holiday, and you have a couple, the lady is always tapping on her facebook, and then you realise she's left her six months old at home. And this is their first trip away, and she feels she has to do this because she feels she has to break that bond. It's not ok, she's got to go back to work, she's expected to be pretty, and to me that's a burden. I don't see that as liberating or independent at all, I think you're dependent upon how other people see you. (Interview 15, female, outside Europe)

Celena explains that mothers' returning to work within the first year of their children's life is not solely influenced by state policies but is significantly shaped by the normative attitudes of friends and family. If women are expected to perform well as mothers in Iceland, there is also a strong social expectation that they will have careers at the same time (Eydal & Gíslason, 2021). This highlights the intricate interplay between societal norms, familial influences, and individual choices in shaping women's decisions regarding work and motherhood in Iceland. The manifestation of this influence can be observed in the discourse of migrant parents on the placement of children in kindergarten. Migrant parents' opinions on kindergarten varies, with only a few opting to keep their children at home beyond the parental leave. To continue to explore the varying discourse on parenting choices and childhood goals, I continue the analysis by discussing migrant parents' views on primary schools. This allows me to explore the continuum of decision-making processes, understanding how these parents navigate their preferences and considerations for themselves and their children, as observed in the choices surrounding daycare and kindergarten, to the subsequent stages involving primary education.

7.3 Being happy in school or doing well? Migrant parents' views on Icelandic schools[4]

Twenty migrant parents from this study have/had one or several children in primary schools in Iceland. Their views on Icelandic education and schooling vary, with two opposite viewpoints expressed by several migrant parents: they consider Icelandic primary school to be chaotic and ineffective for teaching, or they see it as a respectful learning space where children can practice and experience empathy and democracy. Many parents come from school systems where children of primary school age spend their school days sitting, listening to a teacher, and working on exercises for the whole day. Migrant parents in this study perceive Icelandic schools to be the opposite of that model: parents say that children are welcome to move around the classroom, get involved in different activities and that children can contribute to the teaching by

[4] Most of this section has been published in: Gunnþórsdóttir, H., Barillé, S., & Meckl, M. (2019). The education of students with immigrant background in Iceland: Parents' and teachers' voices. *Scandinavian journal of educational research*, *63*(4), 605-616.

discussing and asking questions. Moreover, creative and sports activities are part of the curriculum and primary school children often engage in woodwork, craft work or swimming. This school model is perceived as wonderfully democratic for some, and chaotic for others -sometimes parents in this study hold both opinion of schools in Iceland.

The Icelandic school system challenges some migrant parents' understanding of school as a 'traditional' place for learning. The classroom is sometimes talked about as a chaotic space, where children move as they wish, "going out of the classroom, coming back, eating, drinking". Parents are often baffled by the fact that children in Icelandic classrooms are welcome to move in and out of the classroom when they wish. In their home countries, children in the same context sit down and stay still unless permitted to leave their seats. This lack of mobility is a sign of interest and attention. Movement goes against parents' perception of the school as an ordered and disciplined space. A perceived lack of discipline is interpreted as a sign of chaos and not conducive to creativity, according to the parents.

Aside from chaos, the classroom also is seen by one participant mother as offering the opportunities of a "small democracy" where children who have had enough can decide to "lie down with a blanket and relax" or "go in another corner so they can concentrate to read". This mother's description of the classroom exemplifies the association between discipline and movement; when movement slows down, a certain sense of discipline returns. When rules are present and followed the body is straight and immobile.

Children are not given much homework in first years of elementary schools in Iceland, and many migrant parents perceive this as another example of lack of discipline. Migrant parents often see homework as an objective sign that the teacher and the school are making demands on the child, which further implies an understanding that making an effort is part of their educational experience. Elina, a mother of three children, explains that she would like a school which has both characteristics from her home country and from Iceland:

> I would like something in between [my home country and Iceland], let's say more work but no stress or evaluations, which is [what happens] here [in Iceland], they are not evaluated, no marks. In [my home country] they have grades, some have low grades and repeat the first grade which is not acceptable for me, this is something that shouldn't be. And there should not be [so much] stress put on, [or ideas] that you are stupid... but they should learn. They should do some homework, they should know it's routine to learn something. (Interview 22, female, Central and Eastern Europe)

Elina would be keen to see a school that combines discipline and effort, but without stress or pressure. The accommodating environment and character of teachers is not necessarily well received by parents. One mother from Western Europe, Louisa, objects to her daughter being constantly given easier exercises because she is not quite on the same level as the other children of her age, and insists on the benefits of being challenged:

> She doesn't learn anything if she doesn't have to try. I only want to let her try, but they [the teachers] don't want to because they don't want to make it hard for her. I think if there would be a little bit more pressure she would learn more. (Interview 3, female, Western Europe)

Like some other parents in this study, Louisa is convinced that achievement does not come without effort. This view is constructed through migrant parents' own experience of school education when they were little, or through comparison of nieces, nephews or other relatives who receive education in the migrant parents' home countries. Some migrant parents object to what they describe as the undemanding approach in Iceland, as they believe it prevents their children from reaching their full intellectual potential. Josef, a father from Central Europe of one who has been living in Iceland for thirty years, explains that his daughter never really learned to study seriously during her primary school years in Iceland, and that it affected her ability in later years:

> The surveys of children's school satisfaction show that children quite like to be in school. I think it's partly because they are not pushed very hard, they get away with murder, and especially [my daughter]. She never had to work, because she wasn't stupid. And the demands were so low that she did everything with closed eyes. And only when she went to *menntaskóli* [sixth form], she had a shock because there was a real demand and expectations to learn, and she didn't learn to learn. She thought everything was so easy. [...] She managed to get through [...] but she found it difficult to study seriously. She decided that she didn't want to go to university and went to practical learning. (Interview 19, male, Central and Eastern Europe)

Josef implies that the lack of interest in higher education may have been partly caused by what he perceived to be Icelandic 'low' educational standards in earlier years. A study of parents in the United States shows that attending and graduating from a university is important to a majority of American parents, as exemplified by Wentzel (1998). Many studies indicate that migrant parents across the world have high educational aspirations for their children (Kao, 2002). This is particularly true of well-educated parents from a higher socio-economic sphere, although less educated parents of a lower socio-economic status also have higher education aspirations for their children, even if their access to information and resources are more limited (Fischer et al., 2019; Sewell & Shah, 1968). The educational aspirations of migrant parents have

not been investigated thoroughly in this study, although a third of the migrant parents participants have a university degree, which may have had an impact on their views on education. According to some of the parents in this study, the (perceived) undemanding nature of the Icelandic school system negatively impacts their children's educational future. Other migrant parents have expressed doubts in the quality of education in Icelandic schools (Ragnarsdóttir, 2020). In this research, many migrant parents believe that their children will be unprepared to face the demands of higher education, as exemplified by this mother:

> I would like my kids to have some university degree, and not Háskóli Íslands [University of Iceland], I must say. I think it can be a little difficult if you want to have good higher education. (Interview 22, female, Central and Eastern Europe)

This comment from Elina shows that she does not think higher education institutions in Iceland have reached a competitive level on a global scale. Her negative perception of the educational worth of Icelandic schools and universities is however balanced by a recognition that her children experience much higher levels of well-being in Icelandic schools than they would have in her home country:

> They are happy in school but they don't learn anything. [...] No, they are doing something but there isn't much stress, they are just like... I don't know in fact how they are teaching at school. [...] What I'm happy about is that she likes to go there and she feels no stress from the school. This is for me important, I would say. She looks forward to go to school. But I'm not happy when I hear from her, very often, that they were just watching movies, doing nothing, playing... [...] somehow for me [this] is not school. (Interview 22, female, Central and Eastern Europe)

Elina describes how childhood happiness and educational attainment may be antithetic. This brings us back to the idea that childhood happiness is not enough in itself for these migrant parents, but something to cultivate alongside diligence, effort and discipline. Elina believes that childhood happiness is defective if it does not meet adequately the demands of adult life. Concerns from parents with regard to discipline, restraint and effort are associated with the strong belief that doing well can only be accomplished through effort. Many participants feel that children are able to achieve or perform well when they are pushed to do so. Celena discusses her experience of effort and achievement in Icelandic primary schools:

> There's a little bit of a conflict there, I sense that the teachers want them to do well but at the same time they don't want to push them too much. (Interview 15, female, outside Europe)

"Push", "pressure" and similar words are found throughout the interviews, and underline some of the interviewees' conviction that achievement does not come without

effort. This returns us to the idea of restraint and discipline and more broadly to different modes of education and parenting. As shown by Ciara's narrative at the very beginning of the chapter, some migrant parents are critical of Icelandic parenting as she said, "here there is this culture, we do not [go hard on] the children, you have to talk to them". This mother feels that Icelandic children are not restrained and disciplined but instead reassured and "talk[ed] to". The divergence of migrant parents' views on education echoes that of parenting styles and childhood goals. While some parents prioritise fostering independence, creativity, and happiness, others lean towards emphasising obedience and respect for authority.

International literature shows that parents with higher education are more likely to become involved in cooperation between home and school, and that their level of education is related to their willingness to participate in formal events at school, such as activities and meetings (Bæck, 2010). In the participants' descriptions of communication and involvement with schools three approaches by parents can been identified: 1) a pro-active approach; 2) an active approach; and 3) a neutral approach.

In the pro-active approach, parents actively contribute to communication with the school, for example by joining the parents' association in their children's school. One mother joined the parents' association "to know how the school environment was. [...] If I was dissatisfied with something, I could bring it up at meetings".

The active approach is a more direct form of communication with the school; here, parents go directly to teachers and staff if they have a concern or a question. One mother from Europe, Nina, was unhappy about a small issue at her child's elementary school. Every day, she had to write and sign a piece of paper to confirm that her child had read to her aloud and that she had listened; the mother wanted to let her child write this confirmation herself and went to talk to the teacher about it. At first she encountered resistance, and the teacher explained that this could not be changed; however, as time passed, the teacher finally allowed the child to write the confirmation herself, and the mother was pleased.

Representatives of the pro-active and active approaches are not numerous in my interviews, as parents' preferred method of communicating with the school is the neutral approach; that is, when parents attend meetings and school-related events but not to openly raise issues or concerns and find their own means to obtain the information they need. One mother explained how she made use of the internet to find information she had not understood: "Everything is on the website". Avoiding direct contact with the staff in asking questions, she prefers to get information through the school website. Despite having several concerns regarding her child's education, she never talked to the teachers or to the school staff, and rationalised this choice by explaining that as a foreigner, she should be the one to adapt to local customs and norms:

> Because I'm the one here, and the other parents seem happy with that, so... I have to adapt because I'm from a different country. I'm a different culture, I can't change the system by myself here. (Interview 22, female, Central and Eastern Europe)

This mother exemplifies how both foreigners and locals construct and sustain "us/them" distinctions (Verkuyten et al., 1995). Despite having many opinions to share on the Icelandic school system, the parents of this study generally did not consider it appropriate to express them openly. Some parents take it upon themselves to 'correct' or add to an Icelandic education that they consider lacking. Two mothers interviewed were supplementing the education of their children by teaching them at home. After their day at school, the children went home and did activities and exercises. Although their reasons for doing so are different; one does it so that her child can be on the same level as children at her age in her home country, the other because the Icelandic curriculum is too self-centered for her taste, and she wants to teach her child about her home country. They act in this way because they believe the Icelandic educational system is deficient in this respect and does not satisfy their needs and those of their children.

When some migrant parents talk about what school should be, they hope for a place where an ideal balance exists between understanding and discipline, freedom and control, independence and respect. One of the main objections of the migrant parents regarding the Icelandic school system is the lack of discipline. No rules (or not enough rules) and no structure (or not enough) are concerns often voiced by migrant parents who expect school to teach their children compliance and to follow the rules – which is also, in their view, a necessary preparation for adulthood.

The migrant parents critical of Icelandic education rated the Icelandic schools in comparison to how they perceive that the school system works in their own country and evaluate schools on this basis. They find fault with what they consider to be a one-sided approach to education with an exaggerated emphasis on reading, as well as an almost exclusive focus on Iceland in the curriculum. They talked about how children in elementary schools may have no homework but "they have to read every day". Most of the participants expressed that this emphasis on reading and literacy does not contribute towards a balanced educational program and wonder why such strong focus is placed on reading. Many also express concerns about the curriculum which they consider geographically and culturally self-centered with the consequent lack of knowledge about Europe or the rest of the world that this entails. This is especially true for migrant parents who have dreams or plans to go back to their own country, as exemplified by Jona from Poland. Jona has been living in Iceland for a decade with her husband and her son, and she plans to return to her home country in a few years. She discusses the Icelandic primary school curriculum:

> For example, in history, they are taught nothing about Poland, but a lot about the Nordic countries. He says they are only taught about Iceland, not other countries. In Polish schoolbooks you also hear about how things are in Great Britain, China, Japan and everything. (Interview 23, female, Central and Eastern Europe)

This mother supplements her child's education with home-study. For one or two hours each day, she teaches her child about her home country, Poland, and related topics. Similarly, migrant parents expected the Icelandic educational program to be the same as in other European countries. At least four parents referred to a perceived "difference in levels" between their home country and Iceland and one parent said "they were two years behind in those areas".

Migrant parents also saw some positive aspects of the Icelandic school system, and they made a connection between the lack of pressure and the happiness of their children in the school environment. The school and the teachers are "very person-orientated" and are "respecting [the] needs" of the children. In fact, no migrant parent described their child being unhappy in school, emphasising their children's love and enthusiasm for the friendly school environment. Despite feeling fortunate for their children, several migrant parents have expressed views on how cultural expectations and norms regarding childhood happiness may be irreconcilable with later life capabilities and enjoyment.

This chapter has demonstrated the existence of a cultural conflict about the demands of school education, and the feelings of discomfort resulting from differences in parenting styles between the migrant parents' home country and Iceland. While some migrant parents embrace the cultural change, others feel uneasy about parenting practices, childcare or school. These practices may result in what they perceive as greater immediate happiness for their children (stress-free schooling, carefree childhood) but may result in later displeasure or pain to navigate global demands (employment, unable to cope with responsibilities or the demands of adult life). Notions of gain and loss are at the heart of migrant parents' concerns about children upbringing and education. Some migrant parents in this study, who argue that children should stay home with a parent for the first three to six years of life, suppose that the Icelandic norm of returning to work before the child's first birthday exists to satisfy the demands of neoliberalism rather than being dictated by parenthood and individual choice. They consider the lack of possibilities to stay home with their child detrimental to the parent-child relationship.

Icelandic educational standards and pedagogical approaches sometimes contribute to the satisfaction of migrant parents. Other times, it contributes to their discomfort and causes concern for their children's future prospects. Most migrant parents agree that there is an emotional gain of being enrolled in school in Iceland, as children feel happy and good in school. However, some migrant parents would like the gain to be linked to educational performance which they see as lacking. This inadequacy with their

expectations is perceived as a loss because migrant parents perceive the school curriculum in Iceland as inferior to the curriculum in their home countries. Moreover, these migrant parents contest the pedagogy employed in Icelandic schools and are concerned about their children's learning and future. Their narratives support the idea that educational attainment is necessarily accompanied by some sort of discomfort, and that the happiness of the children should be coupled with effort and achievement. Happiness and achievement are seen as relational and causal items. An adequate and successful educational experience will lead to achievement and accompanying feelings of happiness.

8 Gendered roles and emotions in migration

This chapter examines the interplay of gender within the realm of migration processes and everyday life, specifically scrutinising the ways through which gender relations and practices are renegotiated in migration, and the impact of these practices on migrant and transnational parents' emotions. The analysis of gender roles and relations within the participants' experiences of mobility is useful to understand how emotions are constructed and assigned, and how they are negotiated between 'here' and 'there' in transnational lives. In this chapter, I also explore geographical imaginations of Iceland as a gender equality paradise. This exploration examines how emotions, parenthood and mobility are deeply intertwined with gender dynamics. I begin the chapter by exploring gendered transnational parents' emotions in the context of the absence of their children. Then, I examine whether Iceland offers immigrant men and women the possibility to exist as equals *within* but also *outside* the dual-earner framework by identifying and investigating two main labels and their associated gender roles and relations which are questioned and subsequently adjusted upon migration: the breadwinner male and the mother. Through this examination, the chapter aims to shed light on the extent through which conventional gender norms are questioned and adapted in migration.

8.1 Transnational emotions: when children are away

Words which convey ideas about the transnational family are often emotionally charged, especially when parents and children are living at a distance from each other. In academic literature, the terms "left behind", "away from" and "separated" are common and often suggest a deficiency. Some academic scholarship uses these words to mirror ideas about the abandonment or "neglect" of children living apart from their parents (Givaudan & Pick, 2013; Sulima, 2019). These ideas are expressed in a certain strand of transnational literature exploring the negative aspects of transnational parents' absence. These negative insinuations of parental migration are also found in the "commodification" of love argument in which it is assumed that affection is replaced by objects, and in the assumptions that "distance and absence [...] prohibit the exchange of caregiving" (Baldassar & Merla, 2014, p. 13). However, Baldassar and Merla (2014) and others (see for example Coe, 2011; McKay, 2007), have demonstrated that buying gifts or sending money for your absent children *are* acts of love and affection. Similarly, Baldassar (2016) and Baldassar and Merla (2014) have somewhat contributed to refute the idea, well-grounded in transnational studies, supposing that physical absence equals emotional absence. The use of expressions which reflect more neutrally on the topic have also appeared such as "parenting across borders", "from afar", or

"at a distance". The varied expressions of transnational motherhood have been explored at large by migration studies, while expressions of transnational fatherhood have not sustained the same interest (Aure, 2018; Pribilsky, 2012). In these explorations, emotions have started to generate interest as an object of inquiry, as well as the relationship between gender and emotions. It is to this relationship and to the role of emotions that we now turn to. I start by sharing a story told by Nadia, a mother of two who was away from her oldest child for a year. In this excerpt, she recalls her experience of being in Iceland without her oldest child, a ten year-old son.

*

> When I was sitting or doing nothing, I felt guilty and sad that I left him alone, sometimes I just woke up in the morning and feel I have something in my heart, so I'd just call him and just to be sure that he's okay and everything is well with him. I was afraid that he will not come here, he would just refuse to come here. That's what happened to me almost every day. [...] No one has said that for me, face to face. But I had this feeling that my brother's wives and my friends thought I just went and left my son just to get married to another man. So I felt guilty that I left my son, [that people thought I would just] think about myself, that I did not think about him. But it's just a feeling, no one has said that to me. When I talked to him, he was happy and sometimes I feel that he did not even miss me. [...] The kid always tried to be happy when he talked to me, but my sister told me that he needed me. 'You don't feel that but he needs you, he needs to be with you, even if he shows that he's happy or he doesn't care. He needs you'. When I decided to marry this man here in Iceland, I thought my son would be with me. And I was planning for that, but after that he refused to come. He just said go first, and just see what the situation there is, and I will come after that. And I came the next summer but he also refused to come. He said no, I will stay in the school here, and I don't want [to come]. His father said that [...] he has to decide that he wants to be with you. I know that you are his mother and you love him but he has to decide to go with you and to be with you in Iceland. So that's why he took time until he decided to be with me. (Interview 33, female, outside Europe)

*

Nadia had been living in Europe for over a decade when she met a man living in Iceland whom she decided to marry. She was hoping to move with her son, but he did not join her immediately. When Nadia recalls the experience of living in Iceland without him, guilt and sadness are two of the emotions which dominates her narrative. In her study on Argentinian migrant women living in the United States, Vermot (2015)

shows that emotions are gendered expressions which are performed according to normative socio-cultural practices. She explains that the manifestation of guilt in transnational mother discourses is a 'remedial action' (p.139) to continue to practice love and care across borders and to assume their gendered role as mothers. Nadia's discourse about guilt and the fear of judgment from others about her role as a mother implies that the place of a mother is by her children. By moving to Iceland without her son, she feels that she failed her primary duty of care towards him and experiences considerable guilt. Nadia's guilt is a response to this unusual situation. Vermot (2015) argues that guilt is felt more strongly among women in transnational families. In this study, both men and women participants expressed guilt of being away from their children. For Miguel, a transnational father, guilt is the expression of his disappointment, and stems from failed expectations he had before migrating to Iceland. He moved thinking he would be able to afford to visit his son twice a year. Once in Iceland, he realised that he could not do this. He now sees his child once every other year. When I asked Miguel how he coped with the guilt he made mention of, he answered that he hoped his son would eventually move in with him. His guilt is intertwined with hope as he replaces failed expectations with new hopes about the future. Guilt serves as reassurance that parents have concerns for their children which are commensurate to their parental duties. Transnational parents are aware of their pivotal role in their children's well-being and future and display their emotions as such. Guilt enables parents to enact their gendered parental responsibilities. In some cases, it is not guilt which serves as a vector for displaying parental responsibility and care but anger. Tatiana explains how she was angry not to be granted the custody of her child when she divorced and had to move to Iceland without her daughter:

> I was angry [with the father of my child] the first few years, that he didn't agree to let her [come] here, but after this court matter, I had no choice. I had to accept it [...] I had to accept it, because I had to be here [in Iceland]. Nobody would choose life for me, like her father will not decide where I will live because I have a child with him... I was thinking this way. (Interview 27, female, Central and Eastern Europe)

Far from being her ideal choice, moving away without her daughter caused Tatiana's anger. Her emotional response is the manifestation of the pressure she experienced while being caught between her moral obligation and her desire to be with her daughter, and her personal aspiration of independence and freedom to choose her own path and place of residence. Worry is another emotion expressed by both mothers and fathers that reinforces transnational parents' awareness of their duties and obligations towards their children. These emotions are expressed to enact migrant parents gendered parental responsibility towards their children. Because of their transnational migration, the parents in this study may encounter challenges to fit the norms expected from them. Transnational parents often see their absence as a deficit or a lack, while migrant parents must negotiate their aspirations to fit the norms both 'here'

and 'there'. Similarly to the previous chapter on parenting, migrant parents have to find an equilibrium between gendered norms and roles in their home country and in Iceland. It is to these aspirations and to these roles that we now turn to.

8.2 The Icelandic dual-earner framework

During recent decades, the discourse on gender equality in the Nordic countries has intensified and created a strong perceived relationship between Nordic national identities and gender equality (Siim, 2015). Nordic states place a strong emphasis on the dual-earner model, in which fathers' participation in childcare and mothers' contribution to the labour market are the norm as discussed in chapter 7 (Eydal & Rostgaard, 2014). Against this backdrop, Þorvaldsdóttir (2011) claims that diversity and created spaces of differentiation has often been neglected and that immigrants are excluded from the gender equality discourse. In this context, immigrants are portrayed as unequal because the dual-earner model fails to address the needs and values of cultural and ethnic minorities (Ebot, 2014). Migrant parents may adhere to their own gender and familial norms that diverge from those commonly observed in Nordic countries. Although my research participants were predominantly white, European-educated men and women, not all of the participants were enhanced by the Icelandic dual-earner/dual caregiver model as discussed in this chapter, since it was different from their own norms and gender regimes. Moreover, most participants had preconceptions about gender equality in Iceland, which had an impact on their experience.

Family relations in the Nordic countries are normatively connected to ideals of gender equality and shared parenting (Ebot, 2014). The lens of parenthood and parenting has proved invaluable to dissecting gender equality in theory and in practice in Nordic countries. Although shared parenthood remains a Nordic ideal, it stays "within the context of a gender equality discourse, but [exists] in an everyday reality that is not gender equal" (Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001: 410). The childcare-involved father has gained recent scholarly attention, and the Nordic countries are often regarded as models for contemporary fatherhood (Arnasson & Gunnþórsdóttir, 2016). This image of caring men contrasts with negative depictions of men in migration and transnational literature as misogynists, or migrant fathers portrayed as showing little concern for or even neglect of their children (Haagsman & Mazzucato, 2013; Kilkey et al., 2013; Pribilsky, 2012).

The Nordic region has been described as an area of gender-progressive politics. In their study of migrant men in rural Finmark (Norway), Aure and Munkejord (2015) emphasised the role of mobility and geographical location, and the effect of these factors on the perception of gender roles. In this particular social and rural space, masculinities, understood as a set of particular practices and places in gender relations, became more liberal than conventional and allowed men to partake of activities that

were conventionally seen as feminine (Aure & Munkejord, 2015). The same trend is reflected in my findings about transnational fathers in Iceland. However, some participants have expressed a sense of rigidity among Icelandic gender norms, specifically motherhood. Celena and Elina have both conveyed feelings of inflexibility regarding societal expectations imposed on mothers. By noting that mothers were anticipated to engage in paid employment and to fulfill caregiving responsibilities for their children at the same time, both women have highlighted the persisting societal expectations that exist in Iceland. Examining the gender relations through a focus on the labour market and parenthood allows me to examine the ways in which gender roles are reproduced, intensified or challenged during migration.

8.3 Adjusting masculinities: the male breadwinner and the involved father

The great majority of male migration to Iceland is work-related, and most male participants in this study moved to Iceland for work, as shown in chapter 4. Within the migration context, paid work is most strongly associated with masculinity (Cheng, 1999). When men migrate, their conception of manhood may be challenged by the loss of status they may experience through lack of work, or what men consider suitable work, which often leads to a destabilisation of men's self-image (Jansen, 2008). Men who have to negotiate their new role within the partnership or the family have a variety of coping strategies to help them make sense of the loss or drop in wealth, status or recognition.

While "in many parts of the world increased international mobility continues to serve as a rite of passage into manhood and an affirmation of a migrant's masculinity" (Datta et al., 2008, p. 3), women's identity in migration has moved away from being characterised as "trailing spouses" or "dependents" to professional or (un)skilled migrants (Boyle, 2002). In spite of many studies showing women as independent migrants in the context of the decision to migrate, the transnational literature still sometimes depicts men as breadwinners and women as housewives (Hapke & Ayyankeril, 2018). If paid work is a decisive element to establish 'masculine' identities, being in a partnership was what mattered in the construction of 'feminine' identities (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992). However, the realities of life as a migrant and the challenges of learning a foreign language and accessing the labour market seems to confront this traditional and patriarchal perception of masculinity, especially for men who follow an Icelandic partner to Iceland. Although they are not numerous in this research, three of the male participants who moved to Iceland to follow their Icelandic partner had to give up, temporarily or permanently, their role of breadwinner. Their Icelandic wives were the ones with the necessary resources such as the language, the connections and access to the labour market, as exemplified by Josef:

> I moved very quickly to Iceland, and I wasn't really ready for that psychologically, I was very upset, and I didn't like it at all. [...] I was 33 and suddenly I was feeling like a complete idiot, I was isolated here I didn't know anybody, I couldn't speak to people properly. [...] I had a good job in [X] and suddenly... so it was like a big fall, and I was the weak partner in our marriage. She was from here, she had a good job, she knew people and everything, so I felt very kind of inferior and I guess resentful, having to be here. [...] [I had to rely on her] for money mainly. I was working, [...] The view is that it's equal, but I think very rarely a partnership is equal. So I think it's easier for a woman to accept that situation, to be maybe more dependent on the man, and be the weaker partner. (Interview 19, male, Central and Eastern Europe)

This interview excerpt shows not only a reverse of patriarchal gender roles, but the sense of loss connected to a certain social class and status. Troubled by his new position in the partnership, Josef was reconsidering the power relations at play within his marriage. Research shows that masculinities are multiple and vary across time, generation and class, particularly in mobility contexts where masculinities can be marginalised (Cheng, 1999). Work is an important part of migrant men's lives, and occupations often reflect a gendered division of labour (ibid.). Within the immigration context, experiences of the labour market and the workplace shape men's understanding of their masculine roles, as the concept of masculinity becomes intertwined with work performance (Ramirez, 2011). The "typically masculine rendition of migration which emphasises activity, personal initiative, [and] an ability to take risks" (Datta et al., 2008, p .11) can be replaced by vulnerability, as shown in the excerpt above: "I was feeling like a complete idiot". This man feels "weak" and "inferior", which are opposites of the strength usually attributed to masculine figures: "I didn't feel very much like a man". Patriarchal gender roles are reversed as his wife finds herself in the position of power within the partnership, holding the role of worker and provider. The man is left to renegotiate his current role and his position in this new gender regime. However, instead of challenging gender identities and beliefs within the family by disputing the idea that masculinity is necessarily connected to strength and power, Josef reproduces a discourse that normalises the weakness of women over men by suggesting that it would be 'easier' for women to be 'weaker' or 'unequal'.

Another male participant, Sven, is taking care of his children and studying at home while his Icelandic wife works. Some years ago, Sven stayed in his home country while his wife and children lived in Iceland. Staying in his home country allowed him to keep his employment as manager, but he explains that this long-distance family life was not sustainable for him, so he decided to quit his job and move to Iceland to be with his family. In Iceland, he could not find a position commensurate with his education and experience, so he decided to take on the role of primary caregiver for the children and

to complete a Master's degree. He seems satisfied with his situation because his time at home now can make it possible for him to restore later his identity as a working man:

> [... Here] I had difficulty to find a job where I could use my education or where I could use my experience. [...] I'm tired of those low... it's how I started in Iceland. In taking low-education [jobs]. I think it's not good if you have university education, and you have a job where you don't need it. It's very boring. [...] So I am trying another way, getting high education. [...] We both [take care of the children]. It's mostly I who cooks. Mostly I do the housework and my wife is helping the children with school. (Interview 14, male, Northern Europe)

No longer willing to do a low-paid job because he has a university education, Sven often refers to his previous occupation of manager, which he did in his home country while his wife stayed in Iceland with the children. He went back there to work because it was the place where his status could easily be restored, but it did not work out, as parting from his loved ones was too hard on the family. Negotiating suitable employment and family needs transnationally did not work for Sven. He plans to compensate for his loss of status by studying to become better educated and then apply for a suitable employment position. He sees this as the way to restore his status as a worker and an income-earner in his new country. However, for the moment, he also values the opportunity to be more involved in housework and in childcare. This example also shows that mobility and local expectations have emphasised the importance of fatherhood (Aure & Munkejord, 2015). Many men participating in the interviews talked about how their new life allows them to spend more time with their spouse and their children. Icelandic fathers are portrayed by the media and public discourse as "caring men" (Þorvaldsdóttir, 2011), and this image grants migrant men lacking suitable work more opportunities to get involved in parenting. This was exemplified by Josef during an interview:

> J: I eventually got a job but it was much worse paid than she had, because she had a doctorate and she got a good job immediately, and I couldn't. I was looking more after the household.
>
> S: You took care of your children more?
>
> J: Well, I always did, I was quite an involved father and I enjoyed it. [...] At that time my wife was finishing her doctorate so she was very busy, she had to write her dissertation, so I had more time because I was working. So I spend a lot of time with our children, and I enjoyed it. (Interview 19, male, Central and Eastern Europe)

Josef explains that he may not have been such an involved father if his wife had not been very busy with her studies. If men can no longer identify themselves as

breadwinners, they can identify as involved fathers, a position which according to Þorvaldsdóttir (2011) commands both respect and esteem in Icelandic society.

Because of a lack of proficiency in Icelandic, but also a paucity of connections and suitable opportunities, many men and women end up "de-qualified" through their migration (Burdikova et al, 2018). This phenomenon is not specific to Iceland but to migrant workers around the world (Datta et al., 2008). Several participants mentioned the lack of suitable employment opportunities in Northern Iceland for educated and qualified migrants. Teachers, lawyers, managers, and scientists in their home countries become factory workers, cleaners and waiters in Iceland. Individuals' strategies to make sense of their new situations vary, but participants in this study often try to restore values to these jobs or justify why they do them. Men, in particular, insist on the difficult nature of the work, the fact that they have to do it to provide for their family or to achieve a goal. Thus, the potential loss of status and self-worth attendant upon men's concessions to working in low-paid labour is instead interpreted as a sacrifice on behalf of the family and thus a different but no less important kind of strength. Migrant men render what would have been unacceptable in their home countries acceptable in light of the migration context, whether we talk about low-paid work or family values. However, when it comes to coping with a loss or change in status and wealth, Jansen argues that they are most often masculine problems, and that women are "more resourceful dealing with it" (Jansen, 2008, p. 186). The following excerpts by Alma and Jan illustrate this well, with Alma being very factual and Jan more distressed about his situation. Alma is a migrant woman who married an Icelandic man and moved to Iceland with him. She explains what she did when she arrived in the country:

> I wasn't in a position where I could use my education to do something, maybe I could go and clean, so that's what I did for many years, cleaning in the evening, just to get some money and to do something. (My translation, Interview 17, female, Northern Europe)

Alma describes the ways in which she had to accept jobs that were below her professional qualifications and skills when she moved, while not dwelling much on the feelings that it inspired in her. On the other hand, Jan, who also moved to marry an Icelandic partner, recalled his experience as a factory worker and underlined the difficulties he faced:

> I went straight to work in a meat factory. It was quite difficult a lot of work and the pay was bad. We had much more money being unemployed [in my home country]. (Interview 18, male, Western Europe)

Both participants discussed their experience of working in difficult jobs that did not suit their education nor their expectations of moving to Iceland. Both immigrant men and women often express that they have to fulfil the expectations of the local community, and for those who have an Icelandic partner, the expectations of their in-laws.

Participants claimed that hard work, diligence and being a good parent are qualities that are valued in Icelandic society. Participants mentioned that displaying these qualities facilitated their adaptation within society and their acceptance within their partner's family.

In the mobility process, the ability to establish or join social networks varies between contexts and individuals (Ryan et al. 2008). It is widely acknowledged that networks influence behaviour and different aspects of our identities, values and perceptions (Curran & Saguy, 2001). Moreover, "beliefs become and remain meaningful if and only if one is integrated into networks of individuals who share those beliefs" (*ibid*.). Gabriel has been living in Northern Iceland for over 20 years with his Icelandic wife. He discusses how he had to adapt to the new values of the host country and the judging stance of his in-laws:

> I was a little bit of a macho you know, I'm the man, I'm in charge... [...] I had to shake the old beliefs away, so it took a while to compromise. [...] I think there's a lot of pressure from people around you, especially the wife's family. They are observers and they hear and see what is happening, and they make comments. [...] They make sure you hear these things if they are not happy with something, they make sure you know about it. If you want to make things work in a mixed marriage, you have to consider these views, otherwise it's not worth going anymore. (Interview 12, male, outside Europe)

As a consequence of his new circumstances, Gabriel had to reconsider his place in the family. He pointed out that in his home country, the man is the head of the family and the decision-maker, whereas in Iceland he is half of a partnership. It can be difficult for new migrants to decide whether to follow the gendered roles and beliefs of their home countries or those of the countries they settle in. Adapting to Iceland's beliefs can create discomfort within the family or among acquaintances in the migrant's home countries, especially if they keep strong transnational ties. Yet failing to do so might lead to stigmatisation in the residence country. In Gabriel's wife family, his in-laws often call for a repositioning of his role in the couple and in the family, and it becomes increasingly hard to hold on to a belief that others do not share. When friends and acquaintances disapprove of or reject a role or a belief, gender relations become a negotiation that people have to tackle individually.

8.4 Between free woman and "mother": the negotiation of feminine identities

The new parental law of 2000 (since updated) in Iceland contributed to build a perception of the 'Nordic ideal of gender equality [which] brought with it the vision of shared parenthood' (Gíslason & Símonardóttir, 2018, p. 458). Although this vision

remains a Nordic ideal, this construct of parenthood remains unequal in practice (ibid.). Materials made available to new parents in Iceland do not actively promote shared parenthood or the essential involvement of the father in birth and early childrearing. Instead, they reiterate the primacy of the mother in nurturing and caring for the child for the first months of his life (Símonardóttir, 2016). Moreover, in practice, while children are still babies, mothers often cut down on paid work to take care of their children and they still take longer parental leave (Gíslason & Símonardóttir, 2018). This parenting ideal emerges from Icelandic narratives and particularly from representations of the working mother and the caring/involved father in Icelandic media and representations (Þorvaldsdóttir, 2011).

In Iceland, being a mother at home for women or not taking part in parenting for men are roles that are seen to belong to ancient times or other societies, and they contravene modern Icelandic gender identities as portrayed in the media (Þorvaldsdóttir, 2011). However, if these roles are discouraged in theory, they still exist in practice, as Gíslason and Símonardóttir (2016) have shown. Individuals not conforming to these ideal gender roles and relations also challenge the image of the Icelandic population, which is portrayed as homogenous (Þorvaldsdóttir, 2011), sharing the same beliefs and cultural values and having the same understanding of gender roles and gender equality. Þorvaldsdóttir (2011) observes that migrants with diverse perceptions and views on gender compared with the majority often experience an increased sense of "otherness".

In Iceland, the identity of a woman seems to be connected to a multi-role model combining motherhood and paid employment. A woman's status, privileges and self-esteem often derive from her multiple roles (Rao et al., 2003). Thus, if one of these roles is not fulfilled, a conception of her womanhood is questioned. For example, scholarship has shown that the childless or childfree woman in Western societies defies the role assigned to women, because it is not in work or providing for the family that she seems to achieve a sense of herself but in childbearing: "It is nearly impossible to think about the adult woman who is not a mother without the spectra of "absence" [...] Yet there is an implicit assumption that motherhood is intrinsic to female identity" (Ireland, 1993: 1). One participant in the study explained it was difficult for a woman to decide not to have children in Iceland, where family ties are strong and the family is viewed as "the corner-stone of Icelandic society" (Eydal & Ólafsson, 2008, p. 5).

Similarly, a woman staying at home with her children beyond her maternity leave can be experienced as a challenge and in opposition with the idea(l) of the modern Icelandic woman. One of this study's participants talked about how staying at home was going against the model according to which women are expected to achieve a high standard of education and/or a suitable high-status employment position, to fulfil their role not only as women but also as member of their social class. This stay-at-home mother felt lonely and excluded in Icelandic society where most mothers work, and she

is also in conflict with her family's expectations in her home country. She said in an interview:

> [My mother's] still like "so, when your youngest child is four, then you're gonna go back to work, right?" and I'm like "Well I'm pregnant again Mom", twelve years later...[...] Because you know, her understanding of "a woman should always be independent", "a woman should always have her own money", "be accomplished and blabla blabla". I don't disagree with that, I just have a different way of expressing it. [...] It's so different, how people bring up their children here, and the age they expect a mother to be independent. Like you go away on holiday and you have a couple, the lady is always tapping on her Facebook, and then you realise she's left her six months old at home. And this is their first trip away, and she feels she has to do this because she feels she has to break that bond. It's not ok, she's got to go back to work, she's expected to be pretty, and to me that's a burden. I don't see that as liberating or independent at all, I think you're dependent upon how other people see you. [...] I think that's what independence is, the ability to kind of feel free to do the things that you want to do and be comfortable. (Interview 15, female, outside Europe)

This example illustrates that gender perspectives are also incorporated in class differences and inequalities. Professional accomplishment and (financial) independence are expected of Celena, not only within Icelandic society but within her own family in her country of origin. She decided to care for her children at home until they reach primary school age. Being a different kind of mother can accentuate otherness for migrant women. This resonates with the mother discussed in Chapter 7 who expressed the difficulties she encountered while she was at home on maternity leave. She had trouble coping with the loss of status associated both with motherhood and being a migrant. No less than being "too much" of a mother, not being a mother at all deeply affects feminine self-identities. Both the mother-at-home and the childfree woman are seen as unaccomplished, unfortunate and deviant (Gillepsie, 2003).

The image of the employed mother has been constructed and promoted in welfare societies (Leira, 1992), where going to work and earning a living is what is expected from an individual, be it man or woman. Iceland holds a long tradition of depicting women as strong and independent characters (Magnúsdóttir, 2008). Not being employed, or staying at home with the children, impairs women's social status as socio-economic contributors and suggests that they are weak and dependent. However, the employment of migrant mothers is dependent upon several other factors, such as the presence or absence of childcare and employment opportunities. Also, just as migrant mothers often lack relatives who can take on childrearing duties (grandparents, etc.), which reduces the possibilities for adequate employment, those who hold higher education diplomas also experience a shortage of opportunities. Elina previously

explained that as an engineer, it was difficult to find adequate employment in Northern Iceland. Moreover, as a mother of three without childcare support from her family, she feels that going into paid employment would be a hindrance to the proper functioning of family life. Another study has discussed the hurdles faced by immigrant women to access adequate employment and concluded that recognition of foreign education was a problem, while the inadequacy of national and local support to address these issues was also problematic (Burdikova et al., 2018). It is certainly the case that very many immigrant women are underemployed, with consequences for the women participants in this study ranging from low salaries to the absence of self-worth and self-confidence. Elina says that it is the lack of opportunities for highly-educated women to access adequate employment, coupled with the lack of family support, that confines her in the role of stay-at-home mother.

Gender equality in Iceland is presented as a strategy to empower men and women and allow them to make free and informed choices about their lives, however some participants in the study have been disappointed. Geographical imaginations about Iceland as a gender equality paradise created certain expectations which were not lived up to, and a few participants feel deceived by the promise of gender equality. Two migrant parents share their experiences of gender equality in Iceland:

> Well I think here it's more or less [gender equal]. I would say so. But sometimes I have the feeling that still, when you look at some Icelandic families... there are things that I cannot understand. Because they say that there is a gender equality and everything, but on the other hand, we have an Icelandic couple that we meet, she is staying with the kids most of the time, well she is working but apart from that she is staying with the kids while the guy goes out two or three times a week to play cards with his friends, in the evenings. So he is spending a free evening enjoying himself, but she is staying at home. (Interview 20, Male, Central and Eastern Europe)

> In Iceland women and men have nearly equal rights. [...] Here there is still this strong thing [that] there are some works for women and there are some works for men. Not outside in the working world, I am not talking about that -of course as a woman you could do whatever and learn whatever and you would never have a big problem to find a job, but at home it's the husband's work to take care of the garage and whatever. I was quite astonished about that. (Interview 11, Female, Western Europe)

Both participants recognise that Iceland is gender equal in principle, but that certain practices are still rooted in conventional perceptions of masculine and feminine roles. They explain that they imagined Iceland to be gender equal at all levels, and that this imaginary was rooted in perceptions of Iceland before they moved. The first excerpt, narrated by Piotr, describes his surprise at his friends' social evenings. He describes

the man going out to 'enjoy himself' while the woman is confined within the space of the home. For Piotr, gender equality would have involved allowing both individuals in the couple to enjoy evenings of leisure outside the home. In the second excerpt, Nina confides that before moving to Iceland, she used to take care of the maintenance in her home, but that this has become her Icelandic husband's responsibility since she moved.

This chapter explored two main topics: gendered transnational emotions and gender roles and relations in Iceland. The range of emotions displayed by transnational parents is varied and often includes feelings of guilt, helplessness, worry, anger and hope. Emotions serve as a bridge through which transnational parents can express their love and affection. I did not find significant differences in the ways migrant mothers and migrant fathers displayed their emotions. The exploration of gendered roles in migration showed that in Icelandic normative ideals, both men and women are expected to contribute (equally) to work and family life in Iceland. I have shown that this ideal exists in theory rather than in practice, and that living up to this ideal is a challenge for migrant parents. Moreover, migrant and transnational parents are often tied to the gender normative roles and practices of their own countries and families.

Following Hondagneu-Sotelo's study (1992), the chapter has shown that the shift in patriarchal gender relations and normative gender practices and expectations can partly be explained by new family arrangements in migration. The findings show that it is the family situation upon migration which calls for a renegotiation of gender roles in the family. Migrant men may have to (temporarily) abandon their position as income-earner in the family which they may have been expected to hold in their home country. Women may choose to combine childcare and employment, or prioritise child-rearing during the initial years of their children's lives. In cases where women opt for the latter, participants note that they often encounter challenges in receiving support for their choice in Iceland. This support could be in the form of financial assistance to enable their stay at home, or the social encouragement needed to foster acceptance of this decision.

To a large extent, the gendered identities portrayed in this chapter display emergent ways of being a man and being a woman, opposing patriarchal traditions and following modern Icelandic perspectives on gender relations. Both men and women can combine employment and childrearing, aligning with Icelandic gender roles. However, the influence of societal expectations in the Icelandic context seems to continue to isolate and diminish the self-esteem of migrant mothers not engaged in paid work. In this study, it is predominantly mothers, rather than fathers, who discussed the challenges tied to (lack of) work and identity. This difference may be attributed to the ideals of motherhood and fatherhood in Iceland. While engaged and caring fathers are viewed positively, stay-at-home mothers' face a less favourable perception. This perception perpetuates a social norm where not engaging in paid employment is seen as a deficit.

The exploration of gender roles and relations in this chapter has shown that despite its

portrayal as a gender equality paradise, Iceland continues to face gender inequality, a reality which affects the experiences of migrants in the country. While Iceland's image as a gender equal nation shapes the aspirations of some migrant men and women, some participants experienced a dissonance between these expectations and reality. Some participants anticipated acceptance of their choices, irrespective of whether they aligned with norms in Icelandic society. Instead, these different choices accentuated their feelings of otherness, showing that issues of gender are often intertwined with race and class. This intersectionality is apparent since participants' feelings of otherness are not attributed solely to gender but influenced by other social categories such as their status as migrants and their socio-economic positions. The challenges faced by migrant parents has to be examined taking into consideration the multiple barriers and obstacles they encounter, such as employment, linguistic and financial conditions, as well as lack of time and the absence of adequate support. We discuss these issues in the next chapter.

9 Care-giving capabilities and conceptions of time

This chapter examines the means of access which enhance or deny migrant and transnational parents' care-giving capabilities, and the impact it has on their well-being. Care-giving capabilities are the conditions that provide migrant and transnational parents with time and resources to provide care to their children. Those are often determined both by individual choices and various institutional regimes. The chapter also describes parents' understanding and use of time and the impact it has on parental care and responsibility. The aim of the chapter is to examine the impact of socio-economic and other conditions on the capabilities and opportunities of migrant and transnational parents, with a focus on care-giving and well-being. I start by an excerpt from Tatiana's interview where she discusses the life she was living in her home country and the life she is now living in Iceland. Then, I focus on care-giving capabilities before reflecting on the relationship between time use, wellness and happiness.

*

> I had good education and a good job there [in my home country]. But in real, for this education and job and salary, I couldn't survive in [home country], even with a good job. I had to work, work stressful work, always counting everything, money, it was so stressful that I [couldn't] make mistakes [...]. And it was just so hard to survive for this money, and I was so tired, going one hour to work, working there, going one hour in traffic home, I was at seven o'clock at home. There was no time to spend with child, one hour [and] she was going to sleep. Day after day, and I receive salary, I had to pay this, that and it was nothing left. It was like [vegetating]. No vacation... nothing. No vacation, it was one or two weeks' vacation in [home country], but no money for vacation even if there were. So, when I came here, and I have simple work [...] it was just a shock, but why I was learning [at university] 8 years, taking everything to have a good job, when I just came to Iceland... Peace. Money. Time for child. No stress. I was just learning Icelandic so I'm also translating for people. So why should I go [to my home country]? For what? To work like crazy and get nothing for life? I don't want to go there. (Interview 27, female Central and Eastern Europe)

*

Tatiana describes the ways in which her time use has dramatically changed between her

home country and Iceland. In the former, there was very little time for activities which were not employment related. In Northern Iceland, she can manage her time effectively between employment, childcare, leisure and free time. She demonstrates the relationship between time use and finances in her home country by explaining that free time during the holidays was not used effectively because the lack of finances prevented the possibility of travel or engaging in recreational activities. Time use, finances and caregiving capabilities are often discussed by migrant and transnational parents. Kilkey and Merla's (2013) concept of *regime* is helpful to understand how institutional characteristics and time impact care-giving arrangements. *Welfare regimes* highlight the relationship between the state and the economy and are fundamentally concerned with issues of employment and wages (Esping Andersen, 1990). Moreover, welfare regimes have substantial repercussions on one's use of time and therefore on one's care provision. Feminist scholars have criticised the concept of welfare regime for failing to adequately address the 'provision and receipt of care' (Kilkey & Merla, 2013, p. 214). Therefore, feminists have introduced the concept of *care regimes* (and *gendered* care regimes in particular) to supplement that of the welfare regime. Care regimes are 'designed to capture who is responsible for care' and 'what constitutes appropriate care' (*ibid.*, p. 214). Although the notion of care regimes has the potential to enrich our understanding of the relationship between family and state, Kilkey and Merla (2013) argue that it falls short of explaining the links between family and labour-market in the family-market-state triad (*ibid.*, p. 215). Instead, they call for the use of the concept of *working-time regime* which is meant to "include the set of legal, voluntary and customary regulations which influence working-time practice" (Rubery et al., 1998, p. 72, as cited in Kilkey & Merla, 2013, p. 215). Meanwhile, the term *migration regime* delineates the policies and rules for migrants and intersects with all the other concepts mentioned above. Exploring the relationship between these various regimes and migrant and transnational experiences will allow me to understand how the former impacts migrant parents' care, parenting and well-being.

9.1 Care-giving capabilities framework

This subchapter aims to understand the impact of time allocation and paid work on migrants' parenting capacities and well-being experiences. Exploring the intersection between good parenting and the financial and care-giving capabilities framework as described by Merla and Baldassar (2011) and Kilkey and Merla (2013), I examine the relationship between time, finances and care-giving and parenting abilities. An efficient work/leisure balance, as well as a decent wage, is essential to provide migrant parents with opportunities to live well and to parent well. Although cultural expectations strongly influence care arrangements in transnational families, the main argument of Merla and Baldassar (2011) and Kilkey and Merla (2014) focuses on the impact of state policies on the solidarities of families across borders. They argue that policies impact the care-giving capabilities of transnational families, which include mobility ("the ability to travel

to receive or to give care"), communications ("being able to converse at a distance and to send items"), social relations ("access to a social network of mutual support"), time allocation ("having the capacity to take time to engage in care"), education/knowledge ("opportunities to learn how to use communication technologies and how to master the local language") and paid work ("having access to a satisfying employment position"). I draw on and contribute to this framework by contending that some of the capabilities described above, and in particular time allocation and paid work, are determinant in regulating the care-giving capabilities of the transnational parents of the study and have a direct impact on their well-being.

9.1.1 Mobility

The ability to travel to receive or to provide care is most often determined by time allocation and financial capabilities, especially for those who travel over very long distances. For some parents in this study (a minority), mobility is not a problem: they have both the time and the capacity to go and visit their children and their relatives several times a year. However, other migrant parents and families cannot travel very often to reconnect with their families. Flights abroad are expensive, especially when travelling from Northern Iceland. A parent in the study, Miguel, who is employed full time and renting a room in a shared house, explains why he can only see his child living abroad every other year:

> You know, a flight to [my home country] costs 250 000 ISK. For one. Being married, of course, we both have to go, so half a million for flight tickets. If you go and you spend a half million, you're not gonna be one weekend, so you have to stay there for a month at least. At least three weeks, a month… so… on those conditions, depend where do you work but I work at [X], and [X] actually don't have [paid] vacation. So, what happens, if I go for a month, then I have to ask for a month off, so I don't get salary, so basically, it's like the flights, how much I'm going to spend [there], which is not super cheap right now… […] To go is super expensive. [Once] I didn't have the money, so I went to the bank and asked for an overdraft for that. When I came back, I was paying that shit for like two years. (Interview 28, male, outside Europe)

Miguel explains that returning to his home country to visit his son is very costly, and that it is very difficult for him to travel there without relying on a loan. Travel and family visits are determined by distance, time and finances. Migrants who come from Europe are generally able to visit more often than those who do not, due to the length and the high cost of travel outside Europe. Before moving to Iceland, Miguel had envisioned that living and working in Iceland would allow him a fairly comfortable life and the possibility to travel to his home country at least once a year, but the realities of living costs in Iceland caught up with him. For most of the participants, living in Northern

Iceland adds extra hurdles when it comes to traveling and mobility, with the high cost of reaching the international airport located in the south, and the unpredictability of traveling in winter. Road closures in the winter and delayed or cancelled flights are common occurrences, and the combination of these factors significantly amplifies the difficulties to travel from Northern Iceland.

For transnational families, social relations and networks across borders are essential. Wojtyńska and Skaptadóttir (2019) have noted the essential importance to migrants of recreational visits for kin-work and maintaining family bonds, despite the acknowledgement of the (sometimes) oppressive burden of felt obligations and family tensions. Most of the participants express longing and nostalgia during the interviews when they talk about their home country. These two mothers living in Iceland with their children, Celena and Klara, talk about how much they miss their home countries:

> I miss [home country]. I really want to go back. I miss everything. The summers, for example we have a big garden, working there in an apple garden and making lots of apple juice. [...] I miss this, just be in your garden and pick an apple from a tree or berries, go swim outside in the summertime... Just everything, I really miss it. It doesn't matter how awesome life is here, how good the salaries are or how awesome the people are, your home country is your home country. (Interview 5, female, Northern Europe)

> My children haven't put their feet in the grass for six months... because I come from [X] everything is nature, the moment you get out you go into the lawn, I would spend the morning in the garden planting some carrots, putting in some fertilizer, they would be in a little pool, a little swimming bath, they would potter around, they would play with the neighbour's dog... (Interview 9, female, outside Europe)

Klara's quote suggests that one's love for his home country is natural in human emotion, while Celena describes several activities that she longs for in her home country. The quotes from the two women suggest that longing and missing are not only directed at relatives and friends, but that it encompasses a variety of places, individuals, and customs. Visiting their home country provides a nice opportunity to connect with a space which is familiar. Although a few interviewees say that they would be perfectly happy not to visit their home country, that was not a very popular opinions among the interviewees. Seeing family and experiencing 'home' is important for most participants of my study to feel well. Most of the participants deemed it important to connect and visit family members at least once a year, and to sustain communication throughout the year.

9.1.2 Communication and social relations

Being able to converse at a distance and to send items is essential to care work. Migrant parents in Iceland have relatively good access to virtual communication services, given that internet usage is very high (Óskarsson et al., 2015) and that sending items is easy (although costly). We have seen in chapter 6 that communication is greatly facilitated by ICT technologies, although communicating with very young or with elderly relatives can be a challenge. Communication is certainly one of the capabilities which provides migrant parents with the possibility of easy and equal access to sustaining relationships with their families, since time allocation and paid work have little bearing on the ways migrant families communicate. On the other hand, communication is impacted by the family sense of togetherness and consensus —or lack of. We have seen that migrant parents who are divorced may struggle to communicate with their children if the other parent impairs social contact between them.

Access to a social network of mutual support is not always an easy task for new migrants in Iceland. Despite the general openness and tolerance of Icelanders towards migrants (Bjarnason et al., 2020), most participants in this study often feel isolated and have not created significant connections and friendships in Iceland. It is particularly true for those without Icelandic in-laws and relatives. Nina, married to an Icelander, recalls the difficult times she faced when she first arrived in Iceland and tried to secure friendships:

> That was quite difficult in the beginning. [...] I got to know a lot of people, women, men, everywhere, but it didn't go further. But you know, here, people are so busy. Every woman here has her family, the people who went to school with, they have their work and their surroundings with the people they know, they have their big big big families. That means every other weekend they have a birthday party here, and a birthday party there, so they are busy. And they have no need to get to know somebody else. They have no need to struggle to talk to someone who is not able to speak 100% Icelandic. You meet, and you say hi, but it's not more. So, I didn't have anybody to talk to about my problems, or what's going on at home with the children, things like that. I had nobody. (Interview 11, female, Western Europe)

Nina felt very isolated, and although she was reluctant to meet migrants that could speak her language, she eventually started to socialise with people from her home country and subsequently developed important friendships with them. Some of the participants in the study have no friends to speak of in Iceland, and even though people are 'friendly' to them, they rely on visits to their home country to replenish on social relations and connections. Others only manage to make friendships with other migrants in Iceland, as exemplified by Ciara:

> I have lived all over the world. I know many realities, cultures, people, but Iceland, and Icelandic people… I don't know. The friends I have here are all [foreign]. I can't really seem to…. bond with Icelanders. I don't know why. (Interview 35, female, Southern Europe)

Difficulties to bond with Icelanders in Northern Iceland is a common theme in my interviews. Migrant parents blame lack of time and an already established and close-knit networks of friends to explain why it is hard to connect with people. Josef has been living in Iceland for over two decades, and he has recently decided to go back to his home country. He talks about loneliness as his main motivation to return:

> I find living here fairly lonely, and even though I lived here for that many years, and one of the reasons I decided to go back was because I felt I didn't have any good friends here. […] I always felt I was a bit on the periphery. Which partly is my own fault, because maybe I'm not such a sociable person. I don't go out a lot to seek out company, but before I always had good friends, when I lived in [European country] and when I was in [home country], so I found it a bit difficult to… reconcile myself to it. (Interview 19, male, Central and Eastern Europe)

Josef describes how he failed to create sustainable friendships despite living in Northern Iceland for decades, and that he decided to leave because of this lack of social intimate connections. Moreover, compared to the capital area, Northern Iceland offers relatively limited opportunities to engage in social and cultural activities and to meet others. Research on friendship and kinship in contemporary Iceland is lacking. However, in the 1980s, Ann Pinson (1985) described how friendships with people who are neither relatives nor close to the local community represent a threat to social solidarity among Icelandic families and communities, explaining the ephemeral and distant character of friendships from 'outside'. Recent research on friendships and socialisation among adults in Iceland would be needed to understand the intricacies of loneliness and isolation in migrant communities.

9.1.3 Time allocation

The increasing precarity of people's lives and employment patterns across the world encourages distance and separation. Migrant parents in Iceland often have little help with childcare, and this not only affects their employment prospects and their finances, but also how much time they have to engage in care and how much 'personal time' they get. Kilkey and Merla's (2013) working-time regime concept is valuable to think about how markets impact "how much time is available for care" (p. 215). Long hours and low pay greatly impact migrant parents' ability to interact with their children, though for some migrant parents the trade-off was worse in their home country. In Tatiana's narrative at the beginning of this chapter, she recalls the long commute and the long day of work which prevented her from spending time with her child, even

though they were living under the same roof: 'I was at seven o'clock at home. There was no time to spend with child, one hour [and] she was going to sleep'. In Iceland she has found a work-family balance which suits her needs and the needs of her second child (her first child lives abroad with Tatiana's ex-husband).

The Icelandic emphasis on achieving a work/family balance, coupled with the relatively small size of towns in the country such as those of this study, means that many individuals have more time in Iceland than they would elsewhere. Before migrating to Iceland, many of the surveyed parents used to live in big cities with endless commutes, shopping trips and little time for anything besides work, as exemplified by this father, Piotr:

> In [home country] we were traveling one hour, one hour and a half by car, two hours by bus, so imagine what would be the family life [...] if we were traveling two hours to work both ways? So, I really enjoy living here because it's very calm and safe and everything, and I like smaller. But *we have a lot more time to use* [my emphasis/NA], we don't use our time traveling, doing things like when you go shopping you go shopping, and you don't have to waste so much time to travel to the supermarket. (Interview 20, male, Central and Eastern Europe)

If you live in Northern Iceland, and providing you live and work in the same town, lengthy commutes and traffic jams are non-existent, and shopping trips are short. If you have an office-based job, or follow school hours, a full-time position will have you work from 8:00 to 16:00 on weekdays, leaving considerable time for other activities. However, working during the 'ideal' working hours between 8.00 and 16.00, while your child is in childcare or at school, remain an impossibility for several parents participating in the study. These ideal working hours often remain an object of desire for migrant parents. For many of them in Iceland, finding employment which is compatible with their children's school schedule is important. The frequent necessity to work beyond school hours is an added complication to migrant parents' lives. Without family or social support in Iceland, or the possibility of paying for childcare after kindergarten hours, securing family-friendly employment is a goal for many migrant parents. Three mothers, Emilia, Nina and Maja, shared their experiences during interviews:

> I quit after [my parental leave], when I was supposed to come back. I wouldn't have been able to do it, because [partner] starts work at 7, and I would start at 4:00 [...], and kindergarten starts at 8:00, so we wouldn't have been able to do that... and actually these times aren't working well with a child. (Interview 24, female, Central and Eastern Europe)

> I was so happy I got the job and got the possibility to work from 8 to 16, it was not a problem. (Interview 11, female, Western Europe)

> I wanted to learn how to be a kindergarten teacher. I was thinking that it is a perfect job from 8:00 to 16:00 with kids. (Interview 26, female, Central and Eastern Europe)

Emilia, who had one child in kindergarten at the time of the interview, explains how the logistics of keeping her previous employment became impossible with the demands of her child's schedule. Nina and Maja both explain that employment coinciding with the school day is the ideal scenario for migrant parents in Iceland. The ideal employment time between 8.00 and 16.00 is a big determinant in these mothers' lives, as it influences most aspects of their lives when it comes to time, and in particular how much time they need for care —both childcare and selfcare. Böök and Mykkänen (2017, p. 2–3) use the work of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) and Giddens (1991) to argue that the "individualization thesis claims that in western societies traditional social structures and institutions have lost much of their influence on the individual's life. Consequently, individuals have more freedom, or agency, in choosing how to live their lives". However, housing and subsistence needs are strong determinants in our modern lives and impact greatly the time that remains available for care, family time, hobbies and enjoyment. In my research, better-off families have more time available for care if they desire, often allowing one parent to care for the children full-time while the other engages in paid employment. However, this kind of arrangement remains inaccessible for the majority of migrant parents in this study, and unattainable for individuals who struggle financially. The following long excerpt shows a father's struggle to reconcile financial and well-being needs in his workplace:

> [Workplace] pays good on shift because we are working night shifts. It's not that fantastic. [...] No, I don't really want to [do extra shifts]. Sometimes I do it... I also don't want to be struggling for money, so sometimes I will do it... but I don't like it too much. Once I get rid of all my bills, then definitely [suggesting he will quit his job/NA]. [Workplace] is going crazier, they changed the structure inside the company, they also changed the way that we work. Which is okay in normal circumstances, you know if everything runs smoothly it's okay, but when something happens, it creates problems. For example, if [something unusual happens] or someone is sick, we don't have enough people to handle the situation so... [...] Actually with this change I got like an upgrade, yes, so for me it's okay, but still, when you think about it, at the end of the month, like for example I think I got like, I don't know, 15000 ISK [extra] after taxes... I don't know, I don't even know if it's 15000 after taxes or 15000, and then... I don't know, but when you do the maths at the end of the month, you know you say how much money it is, and it's like 1000 extra per day... And I'm telling you when it goes bad it goes super bad. Like running for 8 hours, going to eat late or not going to eat, sweating, and the people get tired and everybody is irritated, and you know it's a super

> bad situation. At the end of the day, you say this is for 1000 krónur more [per working day]? Fuck this shit. You know what I mean? [...] Right now the [staff is] meeting with the union to increase the salaries and stuff like that, and to do a lot of changes, but like I say. At the end of the day I don't really care if I get... like I said, 15000? It's 1000 more per day. Or the same with the food, if you're not able to eat, [the company] will pay you the food. Fuck the money, I don't need money, I want to eat, I want to have 30 minutes of *pása* [break] , so I can rest my feet, you know. For me, like I say, it's great but I don't care if you pay me 1500 for food. No. No... but you know, having a *pása* on a really hard shift... because eventually you need it. [...] We can't. [...] Those are the days you want to kill yourself and you say, 15000? Even if you pay me 15000 a day this is insane. Insane you know, this is like... you know, I feel bad after work. (Interview 32, male, outside Europe)

Miguel describes the difficult and exhausting shifts he is experiencing at work, which seems to be partly created by lack of staff and organisational challenges. He explains that the company is offering a financial compensation for employees who relinquish their break time. However, for the sake of his well-being, he insists that a break is necessary during his long shifts, and that the little financial compensation offered is not worth missing on a break. Miguel suggests that once he is in a better financial position, he will quit this exhausting job.

9.1.4 Education/Knowledge[5]

Mastering the local language is often a strong expectation in host societies. Upon their arrival in Iceland, most of the participants used English for communication. Those who could not speak it managed to get by. Several participants also noted that they had had to improve their English knowledge when they arrived or are still trying to improve. However, for many of them, English is still widely used as a means of communication in everyday life. This may be the result of better language skills in English rather than in Icelandic, and most of the participants seemed more confident to speak in English, rather than Icelandic. For this project, only 5 people chose to conduct the interview in Icelandic.

When one migrates, language is extremely important both as a medium for everyday communication and to secure a position in the new labour market (Esser, 2006). About a third of the participants (12) do not have high proficiency in Icelandic, and learning the language is often framed as a challenging and unsettling experience. One of the

[5] Some of this section has been published as: Burdikova, A., Barillé, S., Meckl, M. & Gísladóttir, S. (2018). Underemployment of immigrant women in Iceland: a case study, *Nordicum Mediterraneum 13 (1)*.

participant, Emilia, a young woman from central Europe, expressed her doubts regarding her ability to speak good Icelandic:

> I don't think I could do it [a job I saw advertised] because I don't have so good Icelandic to talk with Icelanders if there is some problem or something...I was stressed about it and he [my partner] is angry with me because he thinks I have enough knowledge of Icelandic to do that, but I am still... I didn't feel comfortable. [...] I think they will prefer some Icelander, I honestly think they will prefer someone who is Icelandic. (Interview 24, female, Central and Eastern Europe)

Emilia connected her perceived lack of proficiency in Icelandic to having to deal with the consequences of rejection and othering. When I ask why she does not improve her skills if she finds them deficient, she answers that the local adult education centre does not offer Icelandic courses above level 3. In semi-rural and rural areas in Iceland, opportunities to learn the language beyond a beginner's course are scarce. This includes Northern Iceland, where Emilia and most other participants live. Moreover, some migrants who try to use Icelandic in their everyday say that they are responded to in English by Icelandic individuals. Although migrants know that they mean well, they get upset because it hinders their potential to progress in learning the language. Language gives you access to a variety of advantages, and it is also important to communicate with your children's school and friends. The emotional repercussions of (perceived or real) lack of proficiency are felt strongly among the migrants who cannot speak Icelandic (well), particularly women. Migrants think that a poor level in Icelandic will prevent them accessing adequate employment opportunities.

9.1.5 Paid work

As exemplified throughout the thesis, having access to a satisfying and adequate employment position is sometimes challenging for migrants in Iceland. Moreover, employment opportunities in Northern Iceland remain more limited than in the capital area. Financial preoccupations compel individuals to take up employment for which they are over-qualified (Skaptadóttir & Loftsdóttir, 2020) or accept working hours that are long and detrimental to their health or personal life. It is not only the working-time regime which determines how much (and how well) one may care for others and for oneself, but the financial constraints that come with it. Interestingly, however, some parents in the study asserted that working long hours is not always the result of a financial constraint, but a choice motivated by consumerism. Only three parents discussed this aspect in the research. Two of them explained that being here in Iceland was a strategy aimed at saving money for a specific project or for the future. The third parent expressed his opinion on sacrificing family life for longer work hours and increased earnings:

> I think that we are the type of people who don't care about money so much, well not in the case that we follow the money, but we don't want more and more and more. We are just happy with what we have. But well there are a lot of young people in [home country], well maybe not young, my generation, that are really killing themselves in order to have more and more. For example, my brother had a family, because now the family has split completely, because he was working 24 hours per day and she was working 24 hours per day, and there was no time to meet and chat or just to be at home. And it was something very important for us from the very beginning of our marriage, that we have time for the family, because that's the most important thing, work is just... just work. So for us it's kind of a very important thing. I'm working here, and when I go home, I do nothing related to work. I'm not checking or answering email, nothing. I'm for the family and I come here to work. Two different things. (Interview 20, male, Central and Eastern Europe)

This father, Piotr, explains that working time is sometimes the result of personal choices of earning more, and decided that this was not the way to go for him. Although consumerism may well have an impact on one's employment and lifestyle choices, it does not seem significant among my research participants, the majority of whom are, in fact, unable to act on most of their consumer desires because of financial constraint. About half of the participants are unable to visit family abroad every year because of financial constraints. The experience of a full-time employed mother who moved to Iceland with her child illustrates her financial situation. While waiting for the child's father to join them in Iceland, Ciara has a full-time job and rents a one-bedroom apartment in Reykjavík:

> I am poorer here in Iceland, even if I did not work [in home country]. Saving money is impossible. [...] I cannot give my child a better quality of life if we cannot do things, like go on holidays, or buy expensive toys. Okay, it is against my philosophy to spoil children, but I often find myself saying no. Sometimes I wonder what I am doing here. I am here to earn more, so that my child lacks nothing, but I often find myself saying no we cannot, this is too expensive... [... I would love to buy a house here]. The problem is I don't have the 15% deposit required, otherwise I would have bought a house because if I add up everything I have spent on rent since I'm here I am going to hang myself [laughs]! (Interview 35, female, Southern Europe)

Ciara explains how saving for her is an impossibility, and that she cannot afford much beyond rent and food for herself and her son, and she discusses how her expectations before moving to Iceland contrasted highly with the reality after she settled in the country. Some participants in my study moved to Iceland with high-earning expectations

—expectations which were short lived when migrant parents had to deal with the high cost of living in the country. In 2020, Iceland was listed as the third most expensive country in the world to live in (Rodriguez, 2020). Wages in Iceland may be higher than in most European countries, but housing and subsistence costs are also high. Moreover, migrants' wages are lower than native Icelanders' wages, in particular for migrant women. This is reflected in a study from 2018 (Burdikova et al., 2018) and another from 2020 (Skaptadóttir & Loftsdóttir, 2020). Another study shows that Polish workers in Reykjavík receive lower wages than those in Norway or Denmark (Kristjansdóttir & Christiansen, 2017). These studies, and some of my interviews, suggest that migrants engaging in 'unskilled' labour receive wages which are insufficient to live a 'comfortable' life in Iceland, not to mention afford small pleasures or visits to family and friends in their home countries.

Regardless of Iceland's stereotypical portrait as a gender equality nation, the persistence of a gender-segregated labour market remains (Júlíusdóttir et al., 2013). Women have less access to the labour market, are under-represented in most companies, do not often hold management positions and earn less than their male counterparts (Jafnréttistofa, 2012). The opportunities for immigrant women in the labour market are even worse (Júlíusdóttir et al., 2013). Migrant women earn significantly less than Icelandic women and migrant men and suffer disproportionately from underemployment, as many hold positions for which they are over-qualified (Burdikova et al., 2018). Migrant women suffer from underemployment because of lack of recognition of their foreign qualifications, lack of self-confidence, in particular in using the Icelandic language, and lack of support and social networks (ibid.). Some of them even suffered abusive treatment at work, as exemplified by Alina, a young mother from Central Europe who has lived in Iceland for five years:

> I was working in [this] company, [and] they did not speak so much with me and tell me the rules exactly. [...] I left because they don't pay me so much, because the salary was under minimum [wage]. And because I went and told my boss, I said I wanted to have more money, and she said she needed to think about this, so I went to the union, and from there started a small war between us. [Then] I was given the minimum [but it was not enough]. This is why I left, because of the money. You must buy clothes and shoes and food. It's not a very big difference if you stay home or if you go to work. (Interview 4, Female, Central and Eastern Europe)

For Alina, employment should have an added value and give you advantages that you cannot have if you are not working. Receiving a wage which is similar to the amount of benefits one would get for being unemployed seems unfair to this participant. Moreover, as a mother of two children, Alina has trouble to get by on a small salary. She, as well as several other participants in this study, would like a fair retribution for their work which could afford them a more comfortable lifestyle.

9.2 Time, wellness and happiness

Lack of time is a common narrative for all the participants in my study. When parents talk about time in this research, they talk about 'available' time, as they recast the notion of 'time' as moments to care, to enjoy, to relax or to share. Adequate time is important for wellness, as demonstrated by one divorced father who wanted to drop the 'weekend dad' model for a more suitable option for him. This divorced father was working and living alone during the week, and had the care of his child on weekends. However, between long shifts in the week and a toddler to care for on weekends, he felt that he "didn't have time for [him]self" and found another arrangement more suited to both his needs and those of his son. Several parents mention that they are in a better position to care for their children when they feel good themselves, and consider their right to well-being as an advantage for their children too. Miguel is considering leaving Iceland to pursue other opportunities, even though this would mean living away from his second child (his first child lives abroad with his mother). However, Miguel considers that it is more important for him to feel happy as a parent than to be co-present, because he does not see much worth in being a physically present "sad father". Miguel's situation reflects a perspective that prioritises emotional well-being and personal happiness as essential elements for effective parenting. The apparent opposition between Miguel's happiness and his co-presence with his child arises from his belief that being physically present is not enough if he is not emotionally fulfilled and happy. His comment reflects the fairly recent emphasis on caring for oneself to be able to care for another, as shown in Böök and Mykkänen's study:

> In this study, the parents' narratives about their daily life can be seen as reflecting current ideologies about families and parenthood. The individualistic "wellness culture" of present-day society may also impose demands on parents, who then try to do their best for the family by looking after their own well-being: a good parent is a parent who has good physical and mental well-being and who is allowed, more than in previous generations, to talk about his or her own needs and aspirations. Generating individual and collective well-being in everyday family life seems to be the joint "business" of the different family members. (2017, p:11)

However, societal views on family life and wellness vary between countries and families, and for some individuals in this study co-present parenting and family life involve full-time commitment. For example, when talking about his perceptions of Icelandic families, Piotr said that taking time to enjoy oneself as a parent can be in direct conflict with family life. He explained how it was unconceivable for him to socialise with friends in the evenings several times a week, leaving his wife stayed at home with the children. His narrative sees 'enjoying oneself' as an activity incompatible with being the parent of a young child and echoes an earlier perspective from Elina on

'block[ing] your life somehow'. The experience of parenting varies between individuals, and motherhood and fatherhood and their practices have different meanings in various cultures. Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson (2001) argue that employed mothers in Sweden position themselves on three discursive levels: the first position supposes that the well-being of the child depends on the mother's accessibility; the second position assumes that the contentment of the mother beyond her mothering activities is essential to provide well-being to the child, while the third position focuses on the mother as a working woman. The positions of the participants in my study are not too remote from Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson, as they generally classify themselves as one of the following: mothers following the intensive motherhood ideology; mothers who care both for their needs and the needs of the child, and mothers who focus on their career.

The comment made by the mother above that to care for children was to 'block your life somehow' illustrates the intensive motherhood ideology, and perhaps implies a belief that suffering and putting someone else's needs before yours should be a part of the motherhood experience. Parenting young children seems somehow incompatible with your own wellness, an opinion shared by another woman earlier in the text (p.91). Nina discussed her feelings during her maternity leave and explained that motherhood on its own was lacking in her life as a woman, and that she could not 'just' be a mother. Narratives of conflict between womanhood and motherhood underlay many conversations. They showed that for working mothers, finding enough time to care for their children can be a challenge. Stay-at-home mothers also struggle to find time to themselves, as shown by Elina. Elina is a mother of three children from Central Europe. She moved to Northern Iceland when her husband received an employment offer. Since she settled in Iceland three and a half years ago, her primary responsibility has been child-rearing:

> I'm locked at home with kids. [...] I have no time to make new friendships, I'm just driving, driving everywhere. I think everything will change when the kids are older. (Interview 22, female, Central and Eastern Europe)

Elina seems to accept her fate as temporary and imagine that personal time will be regained once her children grow older. If time remains an issue, stay-at-home mothers also experience social pressure to work. For both working and non-working mothers, their lifestyles impact the time they have to take care of themselves, which can be facilitated or worsened depending on their circumstances – whether they have support for childcare, for example.

Migrant parents' care-giving capabilities are regulated by a variety of norms, regimes, ideologies, capabilities, personal choices, institutional settings and a specific understanding of time. When migrant and transnational parents discuss their lack of time, they generally imply that they have little choice on *how* to spend their time. The less migrant parents are able to choose what they do with their time, the less they seem content with their situation. Because adequate employment opportunities are lower for

migrants and that childcare options are scarce, migrant parents do not spend their time how they may wish to. However, I have shown that migrant parents can also have the opposite discourse by saying that they had no time at all in their home countries, but that the lack of traffic and the slow pace of life in Iceland has allowed them to have more time -time often being referred to as childcare, leisure and personal time. Migrant parents' conception of time often implies that an ideal use of their time would give them a good equilibrium between work, family life and time for self-care.

10 Conclusions

By exploring the experiences of transnational and migrant parents living in Iceland, the purpose of this research was to understand how parental expectations, choices and realities in migration impacted their happiness, understood here as a sense of (emotional) prosperity. Paying particular attention to the location and the societal context in which transnational and migrant parents lived in Iceland, this work focused on the possibility of happiness for those living at 65 degrees north. I have paid attention to transnational and migrant parents, from the reasons that brought them to Iceland to the family practices they engage in, to understand the joys and pains they experience in Iceland. In the conclusion, I summarise and discuss what my research contributes to the study of transnational parenthood in the Icelandic context.

Using ethnography to examine migrant parents' narratives and transnational practices, the research demonstrates that the relationship between migration and happiness is neither straightforward nor dual. The question of happiness, individual or collective and understood as a sense of prosperity and contentment, cannot bear to be answered in binary terms because the relationship between migration and happiness is complex and influenced by a variety of variables and factors that are both individual and contextual. Happiness and prosperity are deeply connected to our personal histories, cognitive capabilities, socio-emotional dispositions and by our expectations and their outcomes. The context in which personal stories evolve also has different effects on different individuals and trajectories, and therefore cannot offer a socio-institutional response that could guarantee happiness or 'successful' migration. The main theoretical and ethnographic examination into the dynamics of migrant happiness and its findings offer to rethink migration 'success' in terms of personal fulfilment and contentment (for which there is no recipe), rather than in terms of economic or 'integration' outcomes. The results postulate that fulfilment and contentment, or happiness, just like emotions, are highly ambivalent, indefinite, adaptable, and fluctuating across the life course. Happiness is a negotiation rather than a product delivered through a formula. The research suggests that although not responsible for individual or collective happiness, the societal context does impact migrant parents' ability to fulfil their desires and ambitions. This work has shown the immense impact of material and financial dimensions, support from family or social networks, and work-related structures in migrant parents' lives. These factors play a significant role in shaping individuals' lives, influencing their opportunities and their well-being (Kilkey & Merla, 2013). However, the societal constraints shaping migrants' lives do not necessarily limit their agency, since migrants also have the capacity to change and to defy societal expectations (de Haas, 2021). In this work, migrant mothers who prioritise caring for their children over

their careers experience feelings of exclusion and isolation. Yet, they also express a profound sense of conviction in their chosen path.

To reach these conclusions, I have sought to combine a theoretical and methodological approach outlined in Chapters 2 and 3 which was to establish the potential links between family, happiness and migration. Engaging with academic scholarship, I have been drawn especially to transnational literature and critical studies on families and happiness. This scholarship offered perspectives which went beyond a binary understanding of the world as migration transcends the framework of success or failure. Understanding people's lives in these terms inadequately captures the nuanced realities and experiences of migrants. The evaluation of migration outcomes is context-dependent and subjective. Transnational studies proposed to reconsider the relationship of individuals on the move with the places and the people which are significant to them. Migrants are no longer thought to be uprooted from one place and one culture to another but embedded and connected in several. The transnational framework proposed by Glick Schiller et al. (1995), contending that migrants simultaneously hold various attachments and allegiances to several places and cultures, is still very much relevant today. Similarly, the family is understood as a flexible and dynamic assemblage, rather than a static unit (Baldassar, 2016). Members of the transnational family live across borders, languages and traditions and come together to form and practice kin relationships (Baldassar et al., 2014). Baldassar et al. (2014) call for a normalisation of the transnational family which is an increasingly visible family form across the world. Finally, anthropological scholarship on happiness has demonstrated that the question of quantifying happiness is more relevant (Thin, 2012) when coupled with qualitative research. Anthropologists and other researchers should preoccupy themselves with deepening understanding of wellbeing and the good life across space and time.

Turning to ethnography, I pursued to answer my more specific research questions. The fourth chapter 'Geographical imaginations and Mobility' explored migration decision-making and the impact of geographical imaginations on the choice of migration destinations. I interrogated the ways through which Iceland has become a migration destination for my participants, and the impact it had on their sense of place and happiness. Despite coming from cultures of migration, most migrants in this study did not aspire to migrate to Iceland -and some did not aspire to migrate at all. Migration decision-making is often influenced by family and social networks (Haug, 2008). Despite most participants claiming that they had no intention to move, many of them were prompted to come to Iceland by a relative or a friend. Several migrants in this study considered their migration incidental or temporary. Migration decision making often encapsulate a hope for better (Pine, 2014). In conversations, the participants rarely lay out this hope explicitly, although their narratives describe the variety of expectations and hopes that they had before moving to Iceland. The relationship between place, life plans, aspirations, and expectations has played a significant part in

happiness outcomes, as unfulfilled desires and wishes often leads to frustration and disappointment. Transnational and migrant parents in this research often migrated with expectations and a hope for the better, which affected their experiences in migration; imaginations before moving of the perceived high standard of living, gender equality and the Icelandic welfare system provoked either disappointment and frustration upon arrival, or satisfaction and fulfilment —sometimes both. Geographical imaginations, images and narratives are powerful inducement for various forms of mobilities, and they have an influence on expectations and subsequent displeasure or contentment. Future research could pay attention to these emotions which are largely mediated through media and marketing campaigns.

The fifth and sixth chapters examined the practices which supported the constitution of the transnational family, and their impact on the emotional experiences of migrant and transnational parents. The chapters delved into the everyday lives of transnational and migrant parents and focused on transnational parents' (in)ability to perform everyday co-present parenting. The emotional cost of parent/child separation is high but downplayed or negotiated through tangible and intangible practices and thoughts of care. Care happens transnationally for families living across borders (Baldassar et al., 2014). I contend that the emphasis on acts of care did not leave enough space to consider *thoughts* of care as a significant aspect of the transnational parent/child relationship. The high emotional cost of separation is softened through acts (remittances, ICT communication, visits) and through ***thoughts***. Imagining the hypothetical future, in particular, is an important component of the everyday for transnational parents. *Being there for someone* seem as fundamental for transnational parents as *being there*. Emotional work is deemed an important part of parenting from a distance, and it is performed through the activation of memory or by thinking about the future. The hypothetical future is crucial to understand parental affect. Transnational parents often imagine a future where they are reunited with their children and serves an essential function in the parent-child relationship. It serves both the function of being together symbolically and as emotional reassurance and comfort for transnational parents. The emotional experience of transnational parents is not limited to pain, guilt or suffering of being separated from their children. Longing and waiting are key emotions to understand the experiences of transnational parents. So are hope and desire, through which transnational parents show their affection and love towards their children (Baldassar, 2016). The constitution of the transnational family occurs through various tangible and intangible practices. While tangible practices have been investigated at length by transnational scholarship, intangible practices and their role in kin relations and family-building deserve more inquiry. The ethnography revealed that the role of imagination plays a significant part in transnational parenthood; transnational parental affect and care take the form of symbolic family-making through imagination. Such intangible family practices in migration would benefit from further exploration.

Feelings of hope and desire are also at play in parental understanding of parenting

ideologies, as exemplified in chapter 7, as they define the values and practices that children will learn and embrace in later life —or so their parents hope. The ethnography of this research shows that the affective experiences of migrant parents are driven by parenting ideologies and choices (Renzaho et al, 2011). Migrant parents believe that the effect of the possible impact of conflicting parenting ideologies between the migrant parents' home country and Iceland may have repercussions for the children's future. Transnational and migrant parents expect their children to be adequately prepared to face the challenges of adult life, and their concerns for their children's schooling, higher education and future employment are expressed through the approval or rejection of Icelandic education and parenting ideology. For binational families, finding a compromise between the beliefs and values of both parental cultures is necessary for family harmony. Migrant parents who perceived a clash between their parenting culture and the Icelandic parenting culture find this highly upsetting. The emotional experience of migrant parents critical of Icelandic parenting and education is very strong because it disrupts the expectations they have for their children's future since it unsettles their hope for the future.

The constitution of emotions in transnational parenthood is often built on hope which serves as reassurance of transnational parents' love for their children. Scholarship has shown that emotions are often gendered in transnational contexts (Vermot, 2015), however it is not significant in this ethnography. Both mothers and fathers living apart from their children displayed feelings of guilt, anger, worry, and joy. Both genders have also commented on the (re)constitution of gender relations in migration which were often based on hope and on the expectation of Iceland as a feminist paradise — expectation comforted by media and cultural representations (Þorvaldsdóttir, 2011). In this ethnography, this expectation and the production of gendered representations in Iceland have disadvantaged women over men. Migrant parents, especially mothers, expected the societal context to support their various choices, including those who deviated from Icelandic norms. Some migrant mothers who wished to prioritise full-time child-rearing felt that Icelandic society promoted the employment of mothers, rather than accommodating diverse family and women's preferences.

This ethnography revealed that against the backdrop of the representation of a gender equality paradise and equitable society, the impact of welfare state policies on migrants' capabilities is evident. Investigating the relationship between time allocation, paid work and parenting abilities has shown that migrant and transnational parents' have a variety of experiences in their capacity to choose their employment, their childcare, or their use of time. Broadening possibilities to live outside the dual-earner model would greatly improve some of the participants' satisfaction. Increasing suitable employment opportunities and the potential for social mobility would also benefit migrant parents in Northern Iceland. Understanding of time varies for migrants, but for many, the lack of control over time is a frustrating experience as many hope for better control and choice on how they can use their time. The chapter also touches upon

social connections and friendships in Iceland, about which too little is known. The narratives of migrant and transnational parents in this research put forward the pressures of normative attitudes and lifestyles which weight considerably in their lives in Iceland. Somewhat bounded by expectations of fixedness and stability, migrant parents' lives are often far from the latter and rather adaptable, changeable and lying in-between time and space.

Together, the chapters unravel the experiences of many migrant and transnational parents in Iceland. The various themes discussed show that the experience of migration produces, modifies and regulates many different types of emotions, including nostalgia, guilt, longing and hope. While nostalgia induces migrant and transnational parents to turn to the past by sustaining networks of care and reciprocity in their countries of residence/birth/citizenship, hope often serves as a guiding principle for the future. Hope and longing are crucial emotions that can allow for greater understanding of migrant and transnational parents' response to the absence of their children and the uncertainty they often face during migration. Transnational parents' love for their far-away children is crystallised in longing and hope for the future: hope and longing for their children to visit Iceland or to come and study in Iceland once they are old enough, for example. Hope is also a powerful inducement for migration-decision making, as demonstrated both by literature and by the several of the narratives of transnational and migrant parents in this study. The research has highlighted the complexities of expectations, choices and experiences of migrants in Iceland and has considered the variety of ways of being a migrant and transnational parent. By exploring what it means to parent in various realities that exist for migrant and transnational parents, the research has focused on the diversity of emotions guiding family relationships at a distance.

Similarly to transnational scholarship (Baldassar, 2016; Ducu, 2018), the findings suggest that the lack of regular physical proximity between transnational parents and their children does not imply abandonment or neglect, but that it does cause considerable emotional tension for parents who constantly try to reconcile their absence with their love and care. Both transnational and migrant parents in this study have demonstrated that their relationships with children and relatives who live abroad is not straightforward but in constant negotiation. These findings are broadly in line with previous scholarship on transnational parents and on families which showed that kinship relations are fluid and fluctuating. The strand of scholarship discussed in chapter 2 had already supported the idea that the love and affection of transnational parenthood was not a poor substitute to 'proximity' parenthood, but rather another way of being a parent across borders. The widespread access to ICT has been an indisputable change for transnational families and relationships across distance (Baldassar et al., 2014; Baldassar & Merla, 2014), and family kinship is increasingly built and maintained digitally (Hjorth, 2020). Communicating digitally is crucial for transnational and migrant parents in this study and essential for the maintenance of the family.

Moreover, this study emphasises the importance of remittances and sees transnational parents' material gifts and financial contributions as emotional work. As shown by McKay (2007) and Coe (2011), transnational remittances are not only a financial transaction but an act of love. Remittances hold a huge place in literature on transnational families, but most studies consider them for their financial rather than their emotional value. This work reiterates the importance of money and financial transactions as an expression of love in family relationships.

My study offers suggestive evidence to call for a better understanding of the multiplicity of meanings of contemporary parenthood(s) in migration, and more broadly of the multiplicity of meanings of the contemporary family. It also aims to encourage the use of emotions in anthropological inquiries since emotions can help anthropologists elucidate part of the human experience. Often overlooked in ethnography, emotions are tangible constructs who serve socio-cultural and performative functions. The research contributed to reinforce moving away from migration studies which solely examine migration from a utilitarian perspective. Although the focus on defining and quantifying the success of migration, the economy, employment and the adaptation of migrants are important issues, it is useful to concentrate on their emotional and individual experiences to understand the broader implications of mobility for those who confront it.

I should stress that my study has primarily been concerned with a small number of individuals consisting of migrant and transnational parents in Iceland, and as an advocate of focusing on personal and individual experiences there is an abundance of stories that have yet to be told about migrants in Iceland. Another limitation of this research is the relative lack of diversity within the individuals participating in this study, as most participants come from WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic) societies. This interrogates how researchers can access and amplify the voices and experiences of everyone, including people of colour, refugees and people seeking asylum, and people living in poverty.

Although the research findings were dictated by data collection and analysis, the choices made over the course of the research have also shaped it. In my choice of what was important to study surfaced the voice of invisibility: I wanted to hear about what we do not generally talk about. This posed (methodological) challenges in its own way, since transnational parents were not often disclosing that parenting from afar was their daily bread, and therefore made it difficult to be find participants for this research project. I also wanted to hear about the impractical and intangible processes which led human beings to happiness, all the while never getting the 'straight' answer one would expect from asking 'are you happy' in a questionnaire. In many ways the challenge and the richness of this research stems from this impossibility to answer yes or no to the happiness question. My participants pondered, trailed off, digressed, rambled, and contradicted themselves -which is what an anthropological study is meant to be about.

Like for wool, I was left to sort and comb the tiny knots left from shearing to be able to make sense of their confessions. Navigating this complex path helped me develop insights into the well-being of migrant and transnational parents, which should be a priority in policy and practice. The 'success' of migration cannot be measured solely in economic terms. Rather, nation-states should thrive for improving the quality of life and happiness of their residents and accommodate the diversity of their choices and needs.

Anthropological scholarship has the potential to change this utilitarian focus by conducting research on human happiness and the potential of migration. This would allow for the emergence of migrant-led (rather than state-led) discussions on migration, which may yield more appropriate responses to migrants' needs. Much of the literature on migration in Iceland has shown that migrants experience various degrees of discrimination and disadvantage (Skaptadóttir, 2015). More specifically, migrant women are disadvantaged in the labour market, are more often underemployed and earn less than Icelandic women or migrant men (Burdikova et al., 2018), as exemplified by several narratives in this study. Iceland's commitment to social justice and gender equality should be accessible for all groups in society. If Iceland is to facilitate egalitarian gender relations within (migrant) families, the specific challenges faced by migrants will need to be addressed, particularly their relative lack of access to employment and economic opportunities. As mentioned before, scholarship on migration in Iceland should also expand to incorporate more systematic research on marginalised migrants such as people of colour, people living in poverty and undocumented migrants. This thesis illustrates that there is still significant scope to explore and contribute to scholarship on the relationship between family, migration and happiness.

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