The making and doing of migrant (m)others in Germany – subjectivation in the context of early childhood education and care

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1   Introduction

> "The mother, today, is to be more than a technician in child guidance. […] She has been incorporated as an actual or potential ally into pedagogic programmes advocated by reformers. […] If she plays her part well, the child's future life chances will be immeasurably enhanced; if she fails through ignorance or impatience to realize or to actualize such a learning scheme, woe betide her child when he or she enters school." (Rose 1990: 178)

The above quote from Nikolas Rose outlines an ongoing social process that is restructuring family life in (post-) modern societies: the realignment of public and private responsibility. In German academic discourse, this is referred to as a "new attention to families" (Fegter et al. 2015). Among other things, this attention is associated with an activation of parental responsibility, an "expertisation and pedagogisation of everyday family life" (Thiessen/Villa 2010), an intensified focus on early childhood development and an increase in pedagogical support for and intervention in families (Jergus et al. 2018; Oelkers 2018).

However, in German early childhood education and care (ECEC), not all parents are included to an equal degree in pedagogical and educational programmes. On the one hand, Rose and Pape (2020), in their ethnographic study of childbirth-focused programmes, find that the participants primarily represent socially privileged groups (183). On the other hand, Betz and Bischoff (2018), using a discourse analysis of government policy documents, find that parenting abilities are politically defined as deficient especially when parents are judged to have a low socio-economic status, low levels of education, are single parents, have a 'migration background', are 'culturally different' or lack German language skills (39f.). The effect of these political differentiations is exemplified by interviews with day care professionals, in which nationality, culture and poverty present as partially interchangeable and problema-

tised categories (Betz/Bischoff 2017: 108f., 114; 2018: 40). Based on these social differentiations, the target groups of parenting education and the needs of participants are defined.

Ultimately, the addressees of ECEC in Germany, such as parenting education programmes, are selected and addressed within a nexus of various intersectional categories of inequality and difference, such as gender, class and migration. Operating within this context are differentiating and hierarchising ideas of 'good' vs. 'inadequate' parenting and corresponding problematisations of 'parenting competences' (Jergus et al. 2018; Oelkers 2018).

Othering processes, such as those by which individuals are identified as migrants in racialising or culturalising ways, and the negative effects that can accompany these processes are increasingly reflected in broader academic and political discussions. Concepts of heterogeneity and diversity have also become more established. However, 'the migrant' continues to be a relevant professional and organisational category for potential addressees of social work and ECEC (Amirpur/Schulz 2022). The same applies to 'the mother' and the intersection of these two categories: 'the migrant mother' or migrantified motherhood. Corresponding positionings, attributions and invocations within ECEC in Germany have not yet been systematically analysed.

Research on power and knowledge relations have so far predominantly focused on broad international and national discourses (e.g., Henward 2018; Hunkin 2018) or on specific conceptualisations of care and education (Ailwood 2020; Aslanian 2022). Our study, on the other hand, places an ethnographic focus on actors not only as "globally embedded subject[s]" (Chandler 2013), but as subjects embedded into specific, local ECEC arrangements of parenting education in Germany. We will present empirical data from two parent groups. One group is closely linked to a federal parenting education programme in Germany. The other group became largely independent of this programme over time. We explored how parents who have children below the age of six and are perceived as 'women' and 'culturally different' are constructed as 'migrant mothers in Germany'. We will show that, empirically, the figure of the 'migrant mother' serves as an essential, intersectional reference point in the context of ECEC as she reconstructs the hierarchical practices in this field. In order to elaborate the nature of this process, we will first outline our theoretical and methodological perspective as well as our data corpus. We will then present some key findings from our analysis before discussing our research in light of recent academic debates on the interrelations between education, migration, family, and gender in ECEC.

2 Theoretical and methodological perspective

To capture the making and doing of migrant (m)otherness in Germany's ECEC field as a process, we draw from Foucauldian notions of subjectivation, knowledge and power. Foucault uses the term 'subject' in two different ways: An actor becomes "subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge" (Foucault 1982: 781). Along with this, 'subjectivation' is a formation process in which submission and self-modelling interact. Considering Foucault's definition of "the exercise of power as a mode of action upon the actions of others" (ibid.: 790), a certain scope of action must be given, since it is within this simultaneity of submission and mastery that directing action becomes possible: "Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free" (ibid.). Through this simultaneity of submission and mastery, the subject appropriates power in creative ways and integrates it into an identity which continuously develops: "The subject is [...] an entity that performs its own creation but whose performances are built into orders of knowledge, into plays of force and relations of domination" (Bröckling 2016: 2).

Subjects are historically and spatially embedded into discourses and therefore depend on the reproduction of discursive truths or legitimate knowledge. The 'reiteration' of power inevitably implies discontinuities and deviation, and it also destabilises actors to some extent in their ability to perform as subjects, but mere resistance against this ongoing reiteration entails the risk of social exclusion or devaluation (Butler 1997: 11–16). Therefore, every performance as a subject is permeated and interpellated by a multiplicity of complementary but contradictory discourses and carries these contradictions within itself (Bröckling 2016: 2). A subject thus exists as being and becoming "in the gerundive, as that to be scientifically examined, pedagogically advanced, therapeutically supported, informed, legally sanctioned, aesthetically presented, politically administered, economically made productive, etc." (ibid.).

Building on these assumptions, Bosančić developed the analytical category of "subject positions" for empirical investigations of interactions between actors and discourses (Bosančić 2019: 93). Subject positions comprise discursively constructed subject conceptions and identities which are accompanied by "interpretive schemes, frames, storylines and dispositifs" (ibid.). Subject positions constitute belonging and therefore differentiate, normalize, stereotype, and thus include or exclude. As described by Butler, normative subject positions re-constitute in a process of repeated acts of recognition, which, according to Ricken, can be operationalised as practices of addressing and re-addressing (Ricken 2013: 92–94). Through this, actors are not merely integrated into verbal and non-verbal social practices but constituted as 'someone' and a 'self' in the first place. Actors are inevitably exposed to "addressings", i.e., they are forced to relate to being addressed in certain ways

and to the subject positions referenced herein – e.g., by interpretatively adopting, transforming, shifting, denying or rejecting them (Keller 2012: 102). Accordingly, (re-)addressings can be understood as an interactive practice of other- and self-positionings, in which subject positions and identities are processually (re-)constructed.

In our data analysis, we will draw from all of the aforementioned theoretical and methodological approaches and primarily use a terminology of subject positions, power and knowledge. Moreover, we will use the terminology of 'other- and self-positionings' to emphasise that relations between actors, subject positionings and corresponding practices of convergence and distinction emerge processually.

3 Data

Reconstructing the 'doing and making of migrant mothers' in ECEC requires a variety of empirical data. We therefore chose an ethnographic approach. However, the data collection period between September 2019 and September 2020 was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the collection of data was therefore less systematic than originally planned. As a result, our material includes:

a) observation reports, transcripts from several semi-structured and ethnographic interviews as well as documents from one parenting education group and its federal umbrella programme. This group (group 1) exclusively aims at the integration of children identified as migrants into ECEC services.

b) five in-depth interviews with the parental guide and participants of another group of parents (group 2) which, over time, was hived off from the aforementioned federally funded programme and continued to be run by the parental guide on a voluntary basis.

In both groups, the interviews with the participants were (to be) accompanied by the parental guides, although it was also possible to provide translators, and participants were free to choose the place and time of the interviews. As a first finding from the field, we interpreted this as a self-positioning of the parental guides as guardians of the participants. Access to both groups was rather uncomplicated. In key informant interviews and ethnographic interviews, participants repeatedly emphasised the groups' high reputation in their respective communities and the parental guides' exceptionally high level of professionalism. In consequence, our collected data should be quite useful for our analysis of normative subject positions, other-positionings, and knowledge and power relations in the field, but it somewhat limits our perspective on the actual modes of subjectivation and the participants' self-positionings. Due to the relatively small number of investigated cases,

we generally assume that there might be more subject positions and, in particular, modes of subjectivation than those that we found in our data. However, since little research has been done on the subjectivation of social actors as 'migrant mothers' in the context of ECEC in Germany, we are certain that our analysis at least offers some initial insights.

4 Analysis

For our analysis of the empirical data, we pursued four questions: 1. How are participants selected? 2. What subject positions are the participants provided with? 3. What other- and self-positionings of the participants can be found in the data? 4. What hierarchies of power and knowledge are being (re-)produced in this context? We will reflect on these questions as interrelated during our analysis section but answer them one by one in our conclusion.

In terms of its target group, the analysed parenting education programme explicitly refers to 'migrant parenthood', equating it with a 'specific culture' of the parents. On closer examination, the programme understands 'migrant parenthood' mostly as 'migrant motherhood.' The programme's major focus on mothers is justified on the part of the parental guides and the project coordinators by the idea that women are more willing to participate, and that the earlier labour market integration of 'migrant fathers' limits their time for participation.[1] We saw this in both groups. Men (fathers) were explicitly excluded from group 1, and initially excluded from group 2.[2] Both parental guides argued that women would feel more comfortable without men given their cultural and religious backgrounds.[3] Hence, already on the level of how participants are addressed, the group formats that were investigated draw from culturalising associations of migration with Islamic religiousness and traditional family images. This includes assumed gender relations that are seen as grounded in a) the families' own virtues and beliefs, and b) the socio-structural conditions embedding them. In effect, there is a gender-specific 'migrantness' that is attributed to women and their (current) life situation, so the 'migrant mother' – as a woman – becomes the key person of her child's (early) upbringing and advances to the primary addressee of parenting education. Consider this example from group 1:

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1   Document analysis of official concept papers of the state-funded programme and Parental Guide Interview, Group 1

2   During our field phase, among the participants in Group 2, there was one father among about 20 participating women, as well as a voluntarily engaged "German elderly man" (Parental Guide Interview, Group 2).

3   Parental Guide Interview, Group 1 and Parental Guide Interview, Group 2.

"B: Well, you roughly know, because we work in cooperation with day care centres, the parents who could make a good use of it, with a cultural background, I would say [laughing]. So, the parents with a cultural background, we roughly know. From the locations sometimes, also from the day care centres. And also, the day care directors are very, very nice and they tell us, she or her could really make use of it and she wants to learn a bit more, do a bit more [...]" (Parental Guide Interview, Group 1)

The quote exemplifies a hierarchical and intersectional other-positioning that can be found regularly throughout our analysed data: The 'migrant mother' becomes selected and problematised as the primary addressee of parenting education. To this end, first a 'cultural background' is identified as a specific characteristic that allows for positioning mothers as 'culturally different' as compared to an assumed majority of the society. In a next step, 'migrant parenthood' is transformed into 'migrant motherhood.' By ascribing 'cultural (m)otherness' to the women personally, an individual need for educating and activating the 'migrant mother' is derived and linked to her subjective willingness and motivation.

The practices in the federal programme reflect these asymmetrical assumptions with respect to knowledge and power in ways not unusual in the field of social work. The programme's materials contain norms of early childhood education which are set as superior or complementary to the participants' knowledge, and which become continuously Germanized over the course of their amalgamation with German language training. In addition, the parental guide observes the mother-child interactions on site and invokes an ideal of 'responsive motherhood,' which entails attention to the child's needs and prioritizing them.[4] In group 1, the 'migrant mother' is thus not merely addressed as a subject 'insufficiently qualified in educating her child', but also as a subject 'insufficiently qualified in caring for her child'. Concurrently, both parental guides describe the materials as inappropriate to the participants' actual abilities or needs and distance their work from a 'focus on deficits'. In group 1, which continues to operate under the umbrella of the federal programme, the attributions of deficits to the participants found in the materials are mitigated by adopting the programme's wording of 'educational inspirations' or by addressing the mothers as 'capable if motivated', and as 'great moms doing their best while being challenged in multiple ways by their living situation as a (recently) migrated person.'[5]

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4   "Go and see what he [the child] needs"; "If she is not well, you have to put her [the child] to bed" (Observation Reports, Group 1)

5   "What they say is that in Germany you're never finished, you're always getting letters, you always have to go somewhere. [...] Sometimes when they have an appointment somewhere else in the morning, they have to go there, too, of course. But some of them attend for an hour and then excuse themselves. It's okay, it's all right. But as I said, sickness or sickness of a child can be a reason for not attending. And the weather sometimes. But I have to say, hats

The participants of both groups prefer to position themselves as 'strangers to the German language' and 'strangers to an (ECEC) system that relies on tacit knowledge' e.g., in relation to implicit practices of everyday (day care) life and the (pedagogical) goals behind them, or in relation to the implicit rules of behaviour in the day care centre. This tendency of the participants to resist a subjectivation as persons who need to self-optimize as educators or caregivers for their children is important, because it places at least some of the responsibility for disclosing tacit knowledge to mothers and children – and thus responsibility for integration (into ECEC) – on German society and its institutions such as day care centres. In contrast, the available position of the 'self-optimizing caregiver or educator of one's own children' ascribes this responsibility primarily to the mother herself.

Rejecting the materials' deficit attributions, and in accordance with the participants' self-positionings as 'strangers to the German language', both groups focus on supporting the participants in acquiring German. However, gaining command of the German language becomes associated with the participants' willingness, motivation and courage to connect socially. The participants are repeatedly advised to actively participate in formal or informal language learning, and to privately seek contact with German speakers.[6] In turn, the participants describe both groups as German language-related formats. In keeping with this perception, the participants submit to their own responsibilisation and interpellate themselves and each other.[7] In consequence, the field discursively ties the acquisition of the German language to a whole chain of associations about how to successfully assimilate as a 'migrant mother' in Germany:

"[...] But then comes the war and it was very bad and we are here, had to (..), it's hard. But (..) I, um [sighs] how can I say this? When I'm under stress // Um (..) I say, I thought, I have to be a role model for my children, for my friend [feminine form], for my husband, for everybody. They can't understand what life is here in Germany. [...] For example, I was the first in my family to learn German. Yes. // For example, the older daughter was very sad, she didn't want to stay here, she wanted to go back [laughing]. And she [laughing], yes. Oh [sighs] yes, that's why I thought, I have to start, so that they see and yes, okay, we have to learn German, that's the first step. And also, for the other women, I/sometimes, or not sometimes ALWAYS we have to, we have to learn German, if we can speak well, then we have the possibilities, so society is opened, opened for us. And now they have noticed, for

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off, actually hats off, they're always heroically out there." (Parental Guide Interview, Group 1).

6   Parental Guide Interview, Group 1; Parental Guide Interview, Group 2; Observation Reports, Group 1

7   Observation Reports, Group 1 and Interviews of Participants 1–4, Group 2

example my friend [feminine form] has not yet done an integration course, because they have small children. But when we cook together in a course and I talk to the others, to the guests and they say: '[name of the interviewee] you can explain to us, we have to learn German' [laughing]. Well, that helps, that makes more, I don't know in German, confidence, // self-confident, yes." (Interview of Participant 4, Group 2)

The quote illustrates the linkage of German language acquisition with access to and participation in German society, with women's opportunities and empowerment, and with the intersecting role of the mother, who is primarily responsible for her own assimilation and that of her children. As a migrant and (married) woman, the interviewee expresses a keen commitment to participating in society, which she associates with gaining educational and professional opportunities, and to becoming independent of German-language support. Young children are depicted as a constraint to learning German and taking advantage of opportunities. Alongside the ideal of the 'self-sufficient woman', the norm of the 'working mother' is latent here. In further material, a culturalising and gendering logic is reproduced when independence from translational support is repeatedly emphasised only in relation to the husband.[8] As a migrant and mother, the subject is interpellated as someone who should acquire German primarily for the sake of her child. The German language is characterised as an inevitable tool for becoming a 'capable mother', namely one who actively engages in the child's early education.

The use of the German language is made a public duty of the 'migrant mother'. In particular, it is linked to participation in parents' nights and conversations with day care professionals:

"[...] Sometimes it's really like that, it's also about the day care professionals' conferences with the parents. And ok, should I go or not? And when I go, do I understand everything, do you think? Yes, please, I say, shoulders back and head up. And first of all, you have to present yourself and stand there as a mum, and that is very important. Especially for your child it is very important, mum takes it seriously and mum is there for me, she is going." (Parental Guide Interview, Group 1)

The approach exemplified in this quote is similar to 'on-the-job learning', with activity emphasized over language skills as a criterion for being and becoming a 'capable mother.' As 'migrant mothers,' the actors are interpellated to become active mediators for their child's educational interest. Here, the subject position of the 'responsive mother' is actualised and expanded, so that the needs of the child are not only

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8   Observation Report, Meeting of the Parental Guides and Observation Report, Parental Guide Certificate Award of the Parenting Education Programme

perceived and met but are also confidently represented in the institutional context. It is thus not only German language skills, but also the courage to speak and thereby individually confront systemic exclusion that is discursively set as the norm for the 'model migrant mother' who overcomes insecurities and acts confidently on behalf of herself and her child with regard to all educational matters.

As a counterpart of the 'model migrant mother,' there is another subject position: the mother who loses contact with, and access to, her increasingly German-speaking child. Such maternal passivity is associated with depression and trauma following (forced) migration and with feelings of shame or insecurity regarding the unquestionable dominance of the German language. It is represented most powerfully in various participants' self-positionings.[9]

Since the child's integration into ECEC institutions is equated with the child's participatory and developmental opportunities in general, the activation of the 'migrant mother' is intertwined with the overall integration of her children into German society. Attending supportive or educational activities such as parenting education or self-help-groups is defined as a performative moment of the actor's 'integration efforts.' Against this background, the motivation or activity versus passivity of the 'migrant mother' are psychologised and characterised in ECEC contexts as an opportunity or, conversely, a risk for the child's integration into society. Concurrently, having young children is viewed as a risk for the migrant mothers' integration into education and the labour market. In turn, the act of becoming a 'model migrant mother' serves as a success story for women who accept support and thereby actively overcome the subject position of a 'failed migrant mother' who would have decided to withdraw into the private sphere.

This relation of knowledge and power is reflected not only in the subject positions available for both groups' participants, but also in those available for the parental guides. The latter, as such, can actively serve as a role model. The degree to which they do so varies, however. Also, a state of 'permanent becoming' is crucial to the part they play. At the awarding of the parental guide certificates, this story is repeatedly performed:

> "Michaela announces a short introduction of the parental guides. They rise
> and line up next to her. Michaela asks Selma to begin. Selma clears her throat,

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9   "Well, our children have already had a difficult life, and that's why I try to be there for my children as a mother. Sometimes it's very difficult, because I have to be strong and I don't feel strong. And I want to be there for my children, but sometimes I don't know how to cope with it. But I have to do it. Because they don't deserve anything else." (Interview of Participant 4, Group 2); "[...] well, yes, my husband and I always try to learn at home [the German language] (.) always, or (.) with the children [laughing], a little bit, not much actually, I learn because I'm always afraid of them forgetting our mother language" (Interview of Participant 3, Group 2); "In the beginning, you are depressed." (Interview of Participant 2, Group 2).

steps forward, introduces herself with her full name and reports which group she is leading. She smiles a little nervously and says – And yes, I am a mother of four myself and this is my first job – She explains that she was asked by the day care centre whether she could imagine leading a group here. At first, she was very nervous about it, but over time she has gained a lot of self-confidence. [..] Now she can transfer this self-confidence to the participants of her group, Selma says. Strong developments can be observed here. The women are doing more and more things on their own, such as conversations in the day care centre or school, where they would never have gone before without their husbands. She learned a lot during her time in the project, Selma says. She thanks the team. [...] Applause and cheers. Selma smiles and steps back." (Observation Report, Parental Guide Certificate Award of the Parenting Education Programme)

Here, the parental guides position themselves and are positioned as 'migrant mothers' among others. However, there is a hierarchy. The subject position of the 'model migrant mother' is largely embodied by pedagogically professionalised parental guides, while the pre-professionalised parental guide in the report quoted above is still in the process of becoming a 'model migrant mother,' yet at an advanced level. Chosen either by day care professionals or by project employees among former participants, the pre-professionalised parental guide represents someone who proved worthy of being positioned as a parental guide 'in the making' and who works up to four hours per week, which itself is framed as a first step towards (gendered) labour market integration.

The two fully professionalised parental guides that we observed and interviewed during this study both self-position as 'mentors' and role models of their participants. In group 1, the parental guide self-referentially addresses topics of settling in Germany, of handling corresponding challenges (while having children), and of everyday family life in Germany.[10] In doing so, the parental guide invokes possible paths of 'good migrant motherhood' through the life experiences making her a 'model migrant mother' and less explicitly through her professionalised knowledge as a parental guide. Against the background of such expertise, the parental guide is accepted as an authority who can legitimately make judgements regarding the subjective emotionality of the participants.

Similarly, parental guide 2 adopts a frame of reference hat situates migrant motherhood not only in the everyday context of family, education and work, but also in the political public sphere.[11] She explains her motivation for initiating the group and its activities – in which the participants frequently address the public and aim for social recognition of migrated people and of cultural diversity in the

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10   Observation Reports, Group 1
11   Parental Guide Interview, Group 2

community – by describing herself as a mother who will not acquiesce to racism suffered by her children in German society. She thereby serves as an example of a new identity assumed by the 'migrant mother', that of an actor for social change motivated by her own children's future well-being. This implies an interpellation of the participants, insofar as they are addressed as mothers and migrants who, as such, can perform as co-creators of the group's activities.

All interviewed participants of group 2 describe their children's well-being and healthy development as their top priority. This is associated with the child's participation in the day care centre, which is further described as indispensable for the mothers' participation in language or integration courses. At the same time, the day care centre is positioned as a partially non-inclusive institution for non-German-speaking children and as an institution without a 'proper', i.e., school-like, educational mandate. Concerning their children's negative experiences in German society, some participants additionally blame themselves for having left their home country, and for exposing their children to flight or to their new life in Germany.

When asked what it is like for her to be a mother in Germany, one of the interviewed participants of group 2 describes it as an exhausting and difficult search for balance, because "you cannot allow everything that is possible here, but you cannot forbid everything either".[12] When asked how she is currently dealing with this, the interviewee and the parental guide who is acting as an interpreter both start laughing. The parental guide comments: "You just brought up a painful subject. For all of us", and thus generalises the search for balance as a universal experience of all 'migrant mothers'. The interviewed participant elaborates:

> "The most difficult thing about your question is that we have to establish a balance between our own ideas of values, of customs, of traditions, of basic religious attitudes that we have brought with us, which we would like to pass on to our children […] and that the children will also experience many other influences, and see many other things, and I always try to tell my children that we should not become a copy of people in this society and that they will never become a copy of us, but that there has to be a middle way somewhere. So that you don't blindly imitate everything, um, but somehow maintain your own identity. But you still have to adapt to the extent that you can cope." (Interview of Participant 1, Group 2)

In this quote, the participant describes migration as being in conflict with parenting. The aim of good parenting is to balance the child's appropriation and rejection of knowledge and practices. On the one hand, the participant describes her child as potentially open to (too) many influences from outside the family. On the other

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12   Interview of Participant 4, Group 2

hand, the child is assumed to be carrying a familial and cultural identity that has to be maintained and should only adapt as much as necessary in Germany.

The parental guide's laughter and her comment during the quoted interview may be interpreted as her conviction that, in the end, even the 'model migrant mother' cannot fully control her child's future in German society. In another interview conducted solely with her, she refers to the previous interview and, in this context, describes not only the 'migrant child' but also the 'migrant mother' as an 'open and transforming identity':

> "[…] for example, like [person] today, she said, yes, if the children get naked [in the day care centre], what's going to happen with them? And so on. I have a lot of understanding for that and I would then tell her, yes, exactly, I always had those fears too and so on and so forth. But then I would try to explain […] that, maybe, from the other perspective, there could also be a reason why you raise children like that. And then I would go back and say, but that doesn't mean that you necessarily have to do it the same way and that you will also/you yourself might also change, so that the attitude you have today might be different in five years and, um, that you also don't know how your child will develop and that you, um, also have to prepare for that. We try to pass on our values to our children, but that doesn't mean that they will keep them, let alone put them into practice. And that it is a consequence of living in a foreign place." (Interview Parental Guide, Group 2)

Here, the 'migrant mother' is positioned as an initially powerless participant, as far as her child's and her own development in Germany are concerned. She is seen as fearful of the possibility of her child developing 'wrongly' in German society and ECEC. As a 'stranger to the system,' she can only prevent this by becoming familiar with it. Only on this basis will she supposedly be truly capable of remaining resistant to certain aspects of educational systems in Germany. Again, this provides for a subject position of a highly competent, active mother – a 'model migrant mother.' Likewise, the parental guide repositions as such a role model. She depicts herself as an expert on the subjective emotionality and development of 'migrant mothers' and describes her approach as slow and gentle guidance regarding (ECEC) system knowledge and practices. This practice of gently guiding the 'migrant mother' via education, role modelling, and gradual exposure implies an ongoing approximation of the 'migrant mother' to the prevailing knowledge and power hierarchies in Germany.

5 Conclusion and Discussion – Governing ECEC via the 'migrant mother'

To conclude, we will first answer our four leading research questions and then inquire into the implications for gender- and migration-related governmentality and subjectivation studies in the context of ECEC.

Firstly, we can infer from our analysis that participants of the investigated groups are selected through official documents, materials, interactive positionings and direct address as 'culturally different', 'female', 'socio-economically deprived', 'child-raising', and – for all of these reasons – as only potentially 'active subjects' who are 'in need of educational and German-language support' in order to achieve an active state. Our data suggests that one or more of the above aspects are highlighted in various ways when the participants are addressed, and this provides multiple opportunities to attribute deficits or potential to the participants.

Secondly, in our data, we were able to identify two main subject positions that the participants are provided with during their participation in the parenting education groups. The first subject position radicalises the inherent deficits that each participant is addressed with as a beginner: It is the subject position of a (potentially) 'failed migrant mother', who withdrew from responsibility for herself and her child and who seeks shelter in the private sphere, fearfully hoping for the best for her children, but unable to guide, educate, or even care for her children, since her withdrawal ensures that she will remain a disoriented, uneducated and passive migrant woman herself. As a counterpart to this, there is the subject position of the 'model migrant mother.' She embodies activeness and sovereignty and overcomes cultural and educational exclusion step by step on her own and her children's behalf. She proves worthy to serve as a role model for other 'migrant mothers', which is why she can play the part of a subject who, during a permanent act of becoming, moves up the career ladder of a specifically gendered and 'migrantified' field of parenting education, and presumably beyond.

Thirdly, we were able to identify other- and self-positionings of the participants in our data that complement the subject positions described above. We were able to identify two main types of other-positionings: There are quite openly 'deficit-oriented' positionings of the participants, mainly expressed through the programme's materials and organisational set-up. However, both parental guides engage with these other-positionings only indirectly when they either relativise the federal programme's framework and materials as mere 'educational inspirations' and shift the focus to language acquisition (group 1), or even formally detach their group context from the programme (group 2), with the effect of politicising its participants as something akin to activists who claim social recognition for themselves in German society. In both cases, the participants are positioned as 'capable if motivated', which qualifies them to become all-important subjects of individual and societal change. As a complementary counterpart, we were able to identify other-positionings of the

'migrant child' as an ever evolving and transforming object of parenting. This, in turn, serves as an important relata for positioning their mothers as potentially flexible, self-transforming subjects.

In sum, our data indicates that there is a distinct complex of power and knowledge in the broader context of parenting education in Germany. Its inherent hierarchy builds on an amalgamized norm of 'modern education', 'maternal passion' and 'German culture'. 'Migrantified' actors play an important role in submitting to these norms and at the same time mastering them. As subjects, the actors are offered key positions as model 'migrant mothers in Germany'. As such, they do not only maximize their chances of achieving subjective freedom and self-sufficiency but also serve as useful co-facilitators of a migrantified, gendered regime of 'modern education' in Germany.

Our findings on how the participants of the investigated groups are being positioned as 'migrant mothers' with reference to a broader, neo-liberal regime of migrantification and gendered responsibilisation in Germany (Chamakalayil et al. 2022) coincide with findings from other empirical studies. Arriving at results similar to our own, Nordberg (2015), for example, was able to show ethnographically that actors find themselves positioned as 'migrant mothers' in various contexts and must find ways to relate to these other-positionings. In contrast to our research, this study focused on the actors' self-positionings across different institutional contexts. However, Nordberg states that "following from the understanding of the 'self' as an embedded subject, it becomes analytically meaningful to explore notions of locality, of places and spaces of formal and informal interaction." (ibid.: 68)

Our study revealed some particular relations between power, knowledge and subjectivation in the field of parenting education. Such research proves worthwhile in theoretical terms, as it makes broader Foucauldian assumptions regarding contemporary forms of governing (under conditions of neoliberalisation) more tangible. With our narrow focus on the field of parenting education in Germany, we were able to show that here, governing as a "conduct of conduct" (Rose/Miller 1992: 184) becomes visible as a mostly implicit interplay between actors, discourses and subjectivation in which group participants become selected, individualized, responsibilised and activated as 'migrant mothers in Germany'. As such, these subjects are key to an ongoing exercise of power, not only in society more broadly, but also in the narrower field of ECEC.

They play this key role because, as 'migrant mothers', they are being mobilized and mobilize others as individuals, no matter which of the two available subject positions that we identified in our study they take up or decline to adopt. Those who choose to embody the 'model migrant mother' directly represent values of individualism, responsibilisation, activeness and, therefore, the deservingness of being selected as a 'role model', which in turn secures their integration as a 'modernised', albeit (m)othered self. In effect, the subject position they take corresponds with the

neoliberal, 'enterprising' or 'entrepreneurial self' (Rose 1990, Bröckling 2016). As an alternative to taking this position, participants are 'free' to serve as a contrast to that model – the disoriented, uneducated and passive migrant woman who is incapable of taking appropriate care of her children. With either 'choice', the 'migrant mother' is key to representing a subject position amidst 'standards for conduct' (Rose/Miller 1992: 184) for a neo-liberal regime of a migrantified, gendered society and its system of early childhood education and care.

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