

‘WHEN ARE THE CHILDREN GOING TO LEAVE HOME!’: FAMILY CULTURE AND DELAYED TRANSITIONS IN SPAIN

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ABSTRACT: This paper distinguishes the characteristics of recent trends towards older ages of leaving home in Spain. Based on analysis of in-depth interviews with young people and parents from Bilbao in the Basque Country, I explore how familism and family solidarity play a key role in the current trend towards delayed family formation, focusing on the postponement of leaving home. This analysis illustrates the various leaving home strategies that young Basque people adopt, and how these are negotiated with parents and other family members. The analysis of the interview data also captures the ways in which young people negotiate with and recreate family culture, both while living in and leaving the parental home. The different strategies adopted by young people are classified by a typology based on the extent to which young people recognise and conform to a prescribed cultural model of behaviour, namely leaving home to get married and (preferably) buy a property.

Key words: leaving home; Spain; familism; family solidarity; culture

1. Introduction

Over the last decade or so research on leaving home has expanded, both as a key event in family formation and an integral part of young people’s transitions to adulthood and independence (Young 1987; Berrington and Murphy 1994; Jones 1995; Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1999; Billari *et al.* 2001; Corijn and Klijzing 2001). The study of leaving home very much emerged within a North American/Australian and North European context, where the experiences of leaving home were becoming increasingly disassociated from other family formation and life course events. In particular, the trend observed over the last 30 years in countries such as the US and Great Britain is characterised by a move away from the practice of leaving home to get married, towards more diverse and

prolonged experiences of leaving home transitions (Jones 1995). While many young people do still leave home for partnership (sometimes, but increasingly less so, for marriage) more young people in North America and North Europe leave prior to this; in order to go to University, take up a job, or to seek out an 'independent' life for themselves (Goldscheider *et al.* 1993). Furthermore, leaving home is rarely a one-off event, with many young people returning home after first leaving. This fragmentation of leaving home transitions has therefore occurred concomitant with an overall delay in 'final' ages of departure (Hooimeijer and Mulder 1998). Theoretically, the changes in leaving home practices that have been witnessed over the last 50 years in North America/North Europe would initially appear to be exemplars of individualised transitions (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002), for which the old script about leaving home to get married is being challenged and replaced with more varied and less predictable patterns of behaviour.

Yet while the emphasis on individualisation of youth transitions might appear relevant at an aggregate level, if we take a longer historical focus (Reher 1998; van Poppel *et al.* 2004) and/or widen the geographical scope (Fernández Cordón 1997; Holdsworth 2000; Iacovou and Berthoud 2001; Jurado Guerrero 2001) then the trend towards more fragmented and individualised accounts becomes harder to discern. Leaving home transitions in Spain in particular do not appear to follow the same pattern as those outlined in earlier studies that focused on North America and Australia. Young people in Spain leave, on average, in their late twenties or early thirties, with the majority leaving for marriage. This trend towards delayed leaving home has intensified during the late 1980s and early 1990s, with an increase in co-residence rates between young adults and parents (Fernández Cordón 1997). Researchers documenting the experience of leaving home in Spain, therefore, have focused attention on identifying the reasons for late leaving, and possible causes why this pattern has been extended in recent years. The model developed is based on a trinity of socio-economic factors, under which late leaving emerges as an economically rational decision. These factors are: characteristics of the Spanish youth labour market, specifically high rates of youth unemployment and insecure job opportunities; shortage of affordable housing and limited availability of rented accommodation; and finally, the lack of social assistance for young people, with a strong reliance on the family as *the* main provider of welfare for young people which is characteristic of Southern European welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen 1999; Jurado Guerrero 2001; Baizán *et al.* 2002).¹

1. Esping-Andersen uses the term familialism to define the characteristics of Southern European welfare states 'that assign[s] a maximum of welfare obligations to the household' (1999: 45).

The latter has received much attention as the absence of assistance external to young people's immediate family exacerbates the impact of housing and labour market difficulties, makes young people more dependent on family support, and as a consequence, more likely to live with their parents. In contrast to the experiences of young people in North Europe/America that initially encouraged research on the process of leaving home, specifically the emergence of new transitions and varying opportunities for young people, the picture that emerges in countries such as Spain is of the significance of structural barriers which inhibit the shift towards more diversified and individualised transitions, characteristic of modern European family life.²

The point that I want to stress here is that the overall paradigm within which research on youth transitions is carried out is based on a North European/American model, which emphasises individualisation on the one hand, and the importance of economic barriers on the other. Yet, this emphasis on the impact of structural factors does not adequately account for the role of family ideology in creating the conditions that have led to more young people delaying leaving home in Spain. It is important to consider the ways in which family solidarity and the familistic tendencies of Spanish society not only forms the basis of provision of social assistance (Esping-Andersen 1999) but also how they characterise family practices, specifically relationships between parents and adult children, and consequently decisions about leaving home (Micheli 2000; Dalla Zuanna 2001). The significance of a distinctive Southern Europe cultural model of the family has been discussed by other writers, such as Reher (1998) in his description of distinctive kinship systems in Northern and Southern Europe, but as yet there has been very little consideration of the ways in which individual actors reproduce cultural practices.

To develop a cultural explanation of leaving home transitions, it is not sufficient to simply identify and describe cultural norms that characterise certain patterns of behaviour, such as leaving home to get married, as a descriptive account of what appears to be normative patterns. This does not offer an explanation of how and why these patterns are reproduced (Verdon 1998: 22), nor does it account for deviations from this normative behaviour. The concept of negotiation can be usefully employed to unpack how individuals identify with and reinterpret culturally embedded patterns of behaviour, without necessarily falling into the trap of cultural

2. Debates about modernity and the family emerged in post-Franco Spain, particularly during the mid-1980s, which embraced a distinctive European family for a 'new' European Spain. A number of articles were published that predicted a convergence to North European family practices (see for example Alberdi 1982; Diez Nicolas 1983), and discourses about individualisation continue to influence commentaries on contemporary Spanish family life (see Alberdi 1999).

determinism. Richards's (1990) account of family life in an Australian suburb describes how individuals recreate ideologies through the practices and meanings of home ownership in a very active way:

[N]obody is only a recipient of ideology; ideologies are not made in heaven or by power elites, and beamed out at a vulnerable population. They are mediated through, changed by, and recreated by people in active relationships to these idea packages, not merely by victims of them. (Richards 1990: 106)

The essence of this approach is that individuals negotiate with cultural models to map out their own strategies, which might involve rejecting a dominant cultural model, but are, nevertheless, guided by sets of recognised patterns of behaviour. This approach is therefore, drawing on an active interpretation of how individuals engage with culture, which provides individuals with 'tool-kits' or action strategies of suitable patterns of behaviour that are appropriate to their own circumstances (Swilder 1986; Greenhalgh 1988; Hammel 1990; Richards 1990; Kertzer 1997).³ Additionally, the processes of creating and reshaping family ideology are not experienced in isolation, but through interacting with others, particularly other family members (Hammel 1990: 465). Hence, in seeking to evaluate the impact of cultural practices on family formation, we need to address the ways in which negotiations with ideology are mediated by individual circumstances, such as options for employment and housing, and through the process of social interaction.

This approach will be used to understand practices of leaving home in Spain and how individuals, both parents and young people, negotiate with ideologies of familism and family solidarity. These concepts are used as more than characteristics of family culture, but are more appropriately indicative of how family ideologies are reproduced through everyday practices. As Dalla Zuanna defines familism, it is not necessarily about support for 'traditional' family forms, but more properly describes how people 'do' family in that they:

Consider their own utility and family utility as being one and the same thing;
Believe that everyone else does too;
Follow these two rules throughout their lives. (2001: 139)

This definition of familism incorporates Richards's observation that people are not merely recipients of ideology but are continually recreating

3. This action paradigm of culture is strongly influenced by Clifford Geertz's (1973) account of culture as a model of and a model for experience, whereby cultural symbols make certain world-views and behaviour strategies appear plausible.

ideologies, in that the practices of family solidarity (as defined in the first 'rule') are key to the reproduction of familistic ideology. This link between practices (family solidarity) and ideology (familism) distinguishes family solidarity from related practices of reciprocity and family obligations that are often, though not exclusively, based on inter-generational transfers across the life course (Kohli 1999). Empirical studies of family responsibilities in Northern Europe have established how reciprocities are situational and do not emerge out of a sense of the right thing or a strong ideological ethos, but through individuals responding to particular circumstances (Finch and Mason 1993).

This paper focuses on the leaving home experiences of young people in the Basque Country in Spain. It explores how their experiences of leaving, and their parents' views, are mediated by economic and cultural factors, and in particular the desire to conform to the 'rules' of accepted patterns of behaviour and how the practices of family solidarity are negotiated between family members prior to, during and after the period of transition. I do not want to suggest that the Basque Country is representative of Spain as a whole, in fact regional variation is an important characteristic of Spanish family life (Holdsworth *et al.* 2002). The Basque Country though does record one of the oldest ages of leaving home in Spain (Holdsworth 1998). Economic variables in the Autonomous Community are average for Spain; the unemployment rate in 2003 was just under 10 per cent, slightly less than the national average (INE 2004). House prices in Bilbao are slightly above the national average though cheaper than other cities in the Basque Country and Barcelona and Madrid (Sociedad de Tasación 2001). Tradition and family history play an important part in representations of Basque identity, with the rural family home, or *Baserría*, an important symbol of Basque landscape (Douglass 1988). While externally the Basque region is associated with political radicalism, internally it is dominated by right of centre politics and a strong catholic tradition, and adherence to 'traditional' family practices is recognised as central to Basque identity (Kurlanksy 2000). Yet during the period of rapid economic growth in the 1960s and early 1970s the region also experienced considerable net inward migration from other parts of Spain, and contemporary Basque society incorporates many different aspects of Spanish regional cultures.

2. Data

The data for this study come from in-depth interviews with 18 young people, 15 parents and one older sister and brother-in-law, which took place in residential areas to the north of Bilbao. The respondents were recruited using a modified snowballing technique, and the young people

were chosen to reflect varying socio-economic characteristics. The use of qualitative data of this kind cannot be regarded as representative in the same way as large-scale surveys, but does provide an opportunity to develop a more thorough understanding of the processes and meanings attached to leaving home decisions. The young people who took part were aged between 23 and 32 at the time of interview, and included nine men and nine women, ten of whom had left home and eight were still living with their parents. The youngest age of leaving home was 22 and oldest age of leaving 31. Ten young people come from middle-class backgrounds, as defined by their parents' (usually the father's) occupation, and the remainder from working-class backgrounds. Of those who have left, six left to live with a partner (and in five cases marry, the sixth lived with her boyfriend for 10 months before getting married, and in two cases we have interviewed both partners), and four lived with friends, none lived alone. Four respondents were buying a property, two were renting and planning to buy and four renting (these are the four who were sharing with friends). The ages of those living at home varied from 23 to 31. Fifteen parents were interviewed (two young people requested us not to contact their parents) and one sister and brother-in-law, with whom a respondent had lived since the age of 12. Out of the 15 parent interviews, 11 were with both parents, two were with mothers only as the fathers declined to take part, one was with a divorced mother and another with a widowed mother.

Respondents were invited to talk about their experiences of leaving home and/or living with parents (or young people in the case of parents), including practical issues to do with leaving home, buying a property and getting married, as well as the significance of these events for independence, adulthood and relationships with their parents and/or adult children. Respondents were also asked about their expectations and aspirations for the future. The interviews were carried out by a Spanish researcher (Sara Barrón López) in Spanish, and analysis was carried out on the Spanish transcripts. In translating the interviews for discussion in this paper we have attempted to retain some of the original flavour of the Spanish responses, while at the same time providing an account that is appropriate in an English context.

Each interview reflects a particular account of individuals' experiences, and it is useful to see the narratives as part of the performance of individual life stories, rather than factual or 'true' stories (Lieblich *et al.* 1998). During interviews respondents present a particular story or angle on their lives, they present themselves in a way that they feel appropriate for the purpose of the interview. Doing linked interviews (talking to young people, parents and other family members, e.g. siblings and partners) gives a unique opportunity to explore this dimension of relationships, but also raises important ethical issues about how to present the data. Some linked

interviews are mirror images of each other, while other parents and young people do not always give the same interpretation of recent events, aspirations or relationships. These different interpretations are intriguing and provide a key insight into the process of social interaction and family solidarity, yet care needs to be exercised to protect the confidentiality of each interviewee from other family members. For this reason, material from the case studies has been carefully selected to reduce this risk and links with parents' interviews have not been possible in all cases.

3. Analysis

What emerges from the interviews is a strong sense of the 'classic' way of leaving home. This is unambiguous: leaving home to get married and buy a property. Not all of the respondents had left home in this way and of those who had not yet left, not all recognised that this was how they would choose to leave home. Yet what is intriguing is how clearly all young people and parents were aware of the 'expected' pattern of behaviour. This suggests a very different process of negotiation to that identified by family researchers in Northern Europe. For example, Finch and Mason (1993) describe family responsibilities in Great Britain as created rather than determined, with the process of negotiation occurring against a backdrop of fluidity and flexibility concerning notions of 'the right thing to do'. In contrast, the model that I have developed to interpret young people's and parents' representations about leaving home transitions in the Basque Country, is more explicitly related to the ways in which young people incorporate, modify or reject prescribed models of behaviour. I have identified three orientations to these rites or rules about leaving home and use case studies to illustrate these: *rule follower*, *rule abider* and *rule breaker*. These three orientations are not mutually exclusive and there is some blurring of the boundaries between them. Many respondents incorporate elements of two or even all three orientations. The case studies are given as examples of young people who closely identify with one orientation, though may also display elements of the other orientations.

Rule follower: Some young people clearly see decisions about leaving home and family formation as being closely determined by a set of legitimated practices and norms: namely leaving home to get married (preferably in a church) buying a property and having children a few years after marriage. They themselves expect their lives to follow the same pattern. Rule followers are characterised by both strong recognition and conformity to rules about leaving home and family formation. Pepi is given as an example of a *rule follower*.

Rule abider: Other young people are clearly aware that there is a perceived right way to leave home, yet are not prepared to deviate from these practices, usually because of not wanting to upset their parents. Young people might express a dissatisfaction about having to conform, but do not feel it possible for themselves to break these rules, or only to a limited degree. These rule abiders are therefore characterised by strong recognition yet reluctant conformity to the rules. María and Laia are given as two examples of *rule abiders*.

Rule breaker: This final group of young people recognise that there is a set of legitimated practices and norms, but do not adhere to these and are quite prepared to break the rules. However, even in this group we find that young people negotiate leaving home in such a way as to minimise conflict with parents. Hence, awareness of appropriate models of behaviour provides the back-drop against which a rule breaking strategy is negotiated. Rule breakers, therefore, display weaker recognition and low conformity to the rules. Lapsus is given as an example of a *rule breaker*.

In none of the interviews did we encounter young people who had deliberately adopted a strategy to break away completely from their parents, all continued to maintain contact after leaving home, regardless of the circumstances of leaving. I recognise that this may reflect how respondents were recruited to the sample. In Spanish society it is particularly difficult for young people to leave home and make a complete break from parents, as there are few (if any) support services for young people in this situation. It is unlikely that young people who fit into this category would volunteer to take part in a research project. However, we did talk to two young people (Juan and Olivia) who did not want us to talk to their parents, which is indicative of difficult relationships. Despite this, both Juan and Olivia continued to maintain quite regular contact with their parents, with Olivia talking to her mother on the phone almost every day. What distinguishes their experiences is that despite continuing to receive some practical support from parents, there is also a lot of conflict in their dealings with their parents. In Juan's case this is associated with opposing political views, while Olivia talked about arguments with her father, who she described as having a strong and inflexible personality.

3.1. Pepi, rule follower

Pepi is 28 years old and lives at home with her parents. Her parents are wealthy, and she has a comfortable life, including her own sitting room. Pepi did live away from home when she was a student, though she did not enjoy this, and returned home every weekend. This experience, therefore, can be seen as an example of 'living away from home' rather than leaving

home (Leonard 1980). She has almost complete freedom to come and go as she pleases, and in general does not like to depend on anyone (even though she is financially 'dependent' on her parents). She does not have a boyfriend, which is one of the main reasons that she has not left, as she can see no reason for leaving home other than to get married. Though Pepi appears quite confident about her life and decisions, she is defensive of her situation. She recognises that it might be considered a failure to live at home at her age:

Pepi: That, well, to live in your parents' house at a certain age, because well (...) no, I don't consider that it's a failure but looking at it from the outside (...) I don't think that it's very good

Sara: Do you consider it a failure in our society if a person of your age lives with their parents?

Pepi: No because it is normal. But it is considered, because well, always, they say: 'You don't leave your parents' home before now as they [parents] can support their children' it is what they think, eh? . . . People in the street think [this] 'that (...) why haven't you thought of leaving?'

Family is very important to her and she presents a very traditional familistic discourse, her parents give her the freedom to do what she wants, but will also support her now and in the future.

Her parents endorse Pepi's views on the importance of the family. On the one hand they recognise Pepi's independence in that she does what she wants to do and comes and goes as she pleases, yet on the other they describe their family situation as similar to a mother hen with her chickens. Pepi's father's views dominate the interview and he is adamant that for him, it is best that his children leave home to get married:

Father: if [she] says to me 'I don't believe in marriage and I am going to leave to live with my partner.' Then good, if it is going to make her happy, then go ahead (...) but I would not like it. My children have got married. I like it legal.

For Pepi's father the importance of family is not just restricted to his immediate family as he is one of the few interviewees to explicitly mention the importance of Basque heritage and identity on family life and recognises how people have a spiritual connection to their family homes, even if they now live in the city and the ancestral home is deserted. Pepi's mother takes a slightly different view to family life, and is more open to the possibility of Pepi doing something different to the traditional expectation of leaving home to get married. She does not equate, therefore, the importance of family solidarity with traditional family practices. Unlike her husband she is not Basque but comes from a very

poor region in Spain. She compares Pepi's experiences favourably to her own and argues that it was much harder for women in previous generations to leave home:

Mother: It was more difficult to leave home at that time because women were in a very bad situation, eh? That is, women as they used to say were in the home like they had a broken leg, because, that . . . their freedom was very much restricted. And women have evolved since then, so what before was a bad situation now isn't a bad situation. So then the same has happened to the question of economics. Back then women worked much less.

Pepi's mother recognises the benefits of social and economic change over the last 30 years or so. Yet her daughter presents a very different view on women's opportunities. Pepi argues that it will be much harder for her to have a family, due to the costs involved:

Pepi: I don't discount having a large family, but neither do I discount (. . .) neither am I going to stop working. Well, because the difference between me and my parents is that I'm going to have to work much more; and in order to look after children, equally, it isn't ideal, but well, it is how it is, this is how it affects my life, well it's bad luck.

The dilemma for Pepi is that she wants *her* future family life to be the same as her parents, but she perceives that it is becoming increasingly difficult for her to realise this. Her expectations are closely aligned to those of her parents, particularly her father's, and are clearly influenced by the material and emotional support she receives from her parents.

3.2. María, rule abider

María is 27 years old, she left home at age 25 to live with her boyfriend though they got married ten months later. María went through an emotionally difficult time before she left home, when she split up with an old boyfriend, and her parents took his side against her. She recognises that this was in part because they expected that she would marry her previous boyfriend. She had to demonstrate to her parents that she was capable of taking decisions to suit her and not other people, and consequently this was a crucial phase in her life. She would not have been happy leaving home at this time, as she wanted to resolve the conflict with her parents before she left. María had to negotiate leaving home carefully, she wanted to leave to live with Guillermo (her husband), though was afraid to tell her parents directly, she therefore 'invented' an

excuse of having to take classes closer to Guillermo's house.⁴ The process of leaving home was quite protracted; she took her things to Guillermo's house gradually, and tried to protect her parents' feelings. Although María did break the rules in that she did not leave home to get married, she was not confident enough to tell her parents outright that she was leaving. Moreover, their decision to get married soon after María first left home made her parents more accepting of her decision to leave:

María: In reality I left because I wanted to leave. I had wanted to leave for a long time before, well (...) months before we had taken the decision and we wished to live together. But at the time that I was leaving, I left because I wanted to and I used the fact that I was doing these classes (...) but in reality I did not leave because of the classes. I don't know if I would have been able to explain to them [her parents] that I was leaving.

María remains very close to her parents, she sees them almost every day, as she continues to give private tuition classes in her parents' house. She recognises that this is important in maintaining a close relationship with her parents.

María's parents also describe the importance of daily contact with their daughter. Her mother provides one of the most vivid accounts of the importance of everyday practices in how parents support their children when she describes going shopping and calling María on her mobile to ask if she needs anything. María's initial response is often to say no, but to suggest that she might be running out of one or two items. Her initial hesitation is suggestive that she does not want to be seen to be relying on her parents, but does not refuse their help.

As well as these everyday practices, María also benefited from more substantial contributions when she left home. She recognises that her parents' generosity is in part determined by their own experiences and current situation, as their economic circumstances have improved dramatically from when they were María's age and want her to benefit from this prosperity:

María: They [parents] are more protective than before, they see you as more vulnerable, and perhaps because they had it easier with work [when they left home] they don't see it like that, or perhaps the story is that 'I didn't have it, so I'm going to give it to you' ... for example, now they see themselves with a fully furnished house, and they are not able to accept that you leave home to

4. Guillermo was living with his parents at the time, on leaving home María went to live in a house in the same compound as Guillermo's parents, which was owned by his parents.

live in house without a sofa. Well, they say 'good, we will buy it for you'. But when they left home they didn't have a sofa either; but they say 'right, good if we can buy it for you now, we want to'.

María clearly benefits from the ongoing support that she continues to receive from her parents after leaving home, but she also recognises how this was problematic prior to leaving home:

María: (. . .) but the ridiculous denial (. . .) of the reality that you were growing up. And they [her parents] were constantly treating me more like a little girl, and always creating excuses for me to stay, for example, as a fact (. . .) they didn't mind that I extended my studies by ten years, my career, they paid for me, and they were happy to pay for me, because in this way I was in the house and I was kept in the house.

María, therefore, has abided by the rules in order to maintain the close relationship with her parents, and now that she has left home is more comfortable with this. Yet unlike Pepi she did feel that the parents' treatment reduced her sense of autonomy and that she delayed leaving home, partly to suit her parents, rather than because she did not want to leave.

3.3. Laia, rule abider

Laia is 29, she is currently unemployed and living with her parents. She has a difficult relationship with her parents, as she claims that they are very traditional and she is not; she would like to leave home to live alone (she would prefer to leave to live with a partner, though as she has not got a boyfriend, this is not an option that she considers at the moment). However, she is frightened to tell her parents that she wants to leave. This would upset both her parents; her father because he only lives for 'the family, the family, the family' and her mother, who would think she has done something wrong:

Laia: I feel so sorry, because if for any reason I decide to leave, my mother will think it is her fault, that she has done something wrong, etc, etc, then (. . .) Well we have always lived there and for my mother to be alone and all that (. . .) I don't know (. . .) I think yes. And also, at heart, she is our mother and she loves us; I mean, it would be difficult for her, obviously (. . .) What happens is that I'm always thinking about my parents: how can I tell my parents [about leaving home]? In the end I've changed my mind [i.e. she has not left].

Laia describes how she has to lie to her parents, particularly to cover up sexual relations, as she thinks that her parents would not approve. Laia can be seen as being trapped by traditional expectations, she wants to break free of her parents' control though does not feel that she can achieve this either emotionally or economically. Her parents are very dismissive of her ability to financially support herself, and suggest that if she left home she would have to become a prostitute to support herself. She does not doubt though that her parents will support her, as long as she abides by their rules:

Laia: Yes. I think that my father [will help me], it wouldn't bother him. But of course for that [help] you have to leave under their conditions. For example, if I want to leave to live with some friends, well (...) I don't know how they will react. I told you. My father will get very angry: 'where are you going?' and 'who are these people?'. He will get quite angry.

As for María therefore, her choices about leaving home are influenced by a desire to not want to upset her parents, particularly her mother, but also reflect an economic expediency, that it will cost her in financial terms if she left home for any other reason than to get married. In the absence of other forms of support for young people, the need to rely on parents can intensify young people's expectation to go along with their parents' wishes.

3.4. Lapsus, rule breaker

Lapsus is 27 years old and is sharing a flat with friends. Lapsus left because he had the opportunity to leave, though he recognises that his parents would have preferred it if he had waited to leave to get married. He was a little 'bold' in leaving the way that he did. His mother in particular wanted him to leave later with more security.

Lapsus: Yes, she [his mother] thought that my leaving was a little risky but I think that's a mother's exaggeration.

Though Lapsus continues to have a close relationship with his parents he recognises that he has upset them, particularly his mother, and has had to carefully negotiate his independence from them. For example, he no longer takes his washing home for his mother to do, even though she wants him to do so. Lapsus is particularly dismissive about the need for more security, which his parents would want for him, he argues that his parents

want him 'to have everything more tied up but I'm not going to have it like this in my life, [my life] is never going to be like that'.

Both Lapsus and his mother describe how devastating it was for her when he left. She describes how she 'suffered a lot when he left (. . .) it terminated my function as mother'. In contrast to Lapsus, when his sister left they gave her plenty of support, and would have been willing to do the same for Lapsus. At the end of the interview his mother reflects that when Lapsus left some of her friends and neighbours were rather critical, for example, predicting that 'he will be back in three months'. Though she jokes about this attitude she does hint at the fact that she feels that Lapsus has let the family down in the eyes of the community.

4. Discussion

The particular circumstances that have brought about delayed leaving home and family formation in Spain are a result of economic circumstances and the reluctance of the state to intervene in what is perceived as the family's duty to support young people, as many commentators have argued, but it also reflects the particular characteristics of family life and relations between young people and parents. All of the young people and parents whom we spoke to had a clear awareness of what the family 'is supposed to be like' in Spain, but also of how this has changed over the last 30 years or so. Hence, what emerges is an intriguing perspective on the dominance of Spanish family culture, but also of how the experiences of interpreting and recreating these prescribed family practices have changed.

The negotiations both between different actors (i.e. parents and young people) as well as with family ideologies are influenced by a number of varying factors. One important consideration is financial circumstances. For some young people, such as Laia, the need to minimise conflict reflects the fact that many have no alternative than to rely on their family for support. Even those who leave home continue to receive parental help, for example, meals, shopping or laundry, as María does. While in Pepi's situation family support in the parental home enables her to maintain a standard of living that she could not afford away from her parents. This has led to discourses of '*comodon*' (literally 'comfort'); young people who live the good life at home, without having to pay for it and hence delay departure from the parental home. This creates a dilemma for parents, on the one hand they disapprove of this negation of responsibility and the way in which young people treat the family home 'like a hotel', but at the same time they are reluctant to criticise their own children for this behaviour. This would appear to be a classic example of cognitive

dissonance behaviour (Festinger 1962). Parents often joke about their children's experiences, that they treat the home like a hotel, yet rarely make that direct criticism of *their* children. The contrast with parents' experience is often made. Most parents, such as Pepi's and María's, do not expect young people to recreate their own experiences on leaving home, hence parents are willing to support their children's aspirations, even if they themselves did not realise these aspirations when they were young. Many parents left home with little money and built up their homes and families. Yet, as they left home at a time of economic modernisation and growth, this was not recognised as a risk-taking strategy, but one that enabled them to better themselves and thus facilitate social mobility. The willingness of all the parents in the case studies to economically support their children, regardless of whether their children want this support, is therefore strongly conditioned by their own experiences of relative poverty, or at least lack of material possessions, when they left home.

Yet family solidarity cannot just be reduced to economic exchanges. For those young people who felt more constrained by the need to conform to parents' expectations, not wanting to upset parents, particularly mothers' feelings was a reason for not leaving (Laía) or a factor that had to be carefully negotiated (Lapsus). The emotional ties within families in these case studies are gendered to a certain degree. Gender roles are key factors as mothers bear the brunt of the responsibilities for looking after their children, especially as the majority of mothers of adult children do not work, though this will increase for future generations (Tobío 2001). Among the interviewees, mothers who did work employed domestic help, though none of the mothers in the four case studies worked. In the total sample only one mother recognised that children leaving home was a gain for her, in that she would have less to do around the house. Most mothers, like Lapsus's and María's, were anxious about their children's departure. For the younger generation of women, there is an acute awareness of the difficulty of rejecting the role that their mothers aspired to, and in doing so combining having children and a career. None of the young women interviewed have children, but many, like Pepi, commented on the possibility, and the difficulty of, having children in future.

Discussions of gender are also relevant in accounting for young people's conformity and acceptance of the 'rules'. Women were more aware of expectations to follow the prescribed route, and in particular were more sensitive of the need to go along with parents' aspirations, even if this was something that they themselves were not convinced about. The contrast between María and Lapsus is relevant here. María felt the need to hide her cohabitation from her parents, even though she was going to live in a house provided by her husband's (Guillermo) parents. Though she does not explicitly state this, Guillermo's parents were more supportive of their

son leaving home prior to getting married in that they provided him with the means to do so. In contrast Lapsus felt more confident about his choice to go against his parents' wishes. Among the women whom we spoke to who had difficult relationships with their parents, this was more likely to cause them anxiety, while male respondents were more likely to respond by withdrawing from family life, or, as in the case of Lapsus, renegotiating their relationships.

This recognition of norms and legitimated practices, even if not all young people choose to adhere to them in their own lives, means that the majority of young people are negotiating transitions out of the parental home within a restricted set of culturally prescribed action strategies. While most of the young people who we spoke to expected and/or wanted to conform to one transition, that is leaving home to get married and buy a property, they recognise how much 'harder' it is to achieve this in the current economic climate. Yet this 'classic' transition is so hegemonic, that many young Spaniards effectively edit out the alternatives, echoing Lyn Richards description of 'live ideology' as being 'hard to see through' (1990: 106). The description of culture as hegemonic implies an unconscious acquiescence of actors in the way in which they recreate cultural forms, and as such the model of negotiation with culture is not always inappropriate. For rule followers this appears to be the case, given their perceived lack of options if they are to conform to one expected behaviour pattern within the economic parameters of the Spanish labour and housing markets. But the concept of hegemony also implies a power relationship, if behaviour strategies are adopted unconsciously, then this leaves the question of who is setting the agenda. The origins of Spanish family culture are closely bound up with the doctrine of the Catholic Church, but it is far too simplistic to treat the adherence to family cultural practices as an affirmation of Catholic faith. Rather, evoking Foucault's (McNay 1994) treatment of a more diffuse notion of power, the dominant model of family life described here permeates most aspects of Spanish society, including welfare structures.⁵ Adherence to cultural practices in modern Spain has less to do with the maintenance of the 'old' social order (particularly the status of the Catholic Church), but more to do with the way that the dominant model of family practices and ideology underlines social structures and everyday life.

5. Foucault's account of the indirect nature of power relations, as outlined in his essay 'The subject and power' (1982) treats these relations as working in a concealed way, in contrast to the more direct and visible aspects of relationships of violence. Power can, therefore, take a number of different forms, and is not just restricted to institutional frameworks but also in the way it permeates everyday life.

Hence, rather than looking for alternatives, most of the young people we spoke to are choosing to delay leaving home. Their parents play a key role as they not only endorse *not* leaving home, but may also continue to provide economic support to children as long as they conform to *parents'* expectations about leaving home and family formation. Parental endorsement is not only applicable to young people wanting to leave home, but also to young people who have left, as parents continue to provide both economic and emotional support outside of the parental home. All of the respondents, even those who had left home because of a difficult relationship with their parents, saw their parents on a regular basis, and continued to rely on parents for shopping, food, laundry etc., though to differing degrees. Hence, family solidarity is maintained before, during and after the transition out of the parental home. As economic variables – high unemployment, low job security and rising house prices – mean it is much more difficult for young people to maintain the same standard of living after leaving home, transfers of resources within the family group are particularly important. This contrasts with the experience of most parents; while they may have had limited resources when they left home, *their* parents had even less, hence leaving home for the parental generation was a liberating and eventually financially rewarding experience. Cultural and structural factors are therefore closely interrelated. We might speculate that if young people in Spain were less restricted by financial constraints then they might, as their parents' generation did before them, be more willing and able to negotiate alternative cultural models, and be less constrained by conventional mores.

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EUROPEAN SOCIETIES

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