

Elisabeth Stubberud

## **Au Pairing in Norway**

The Production of a (Non-) Worker

Thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor

Trondheim, June 2015

Norwegian University of Science and Technology  
Faculty of Humanities  
Department of Interdisciplinary Studies of Culture



**NTNU – Trondheim**  
Norwegian University of  
Science and Technology

**NTNU**

Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor

Faculty of Humanities

Department of Interdisciplinary Studies of Culture

© Elisabeth Stubberud

ISBN 978-82-326-0802-7 (printed ver.)

ISBN 978-82-326-0803-4 (electronic ver.)

ISSN 1503-8181

Doctoral theses at NTNU, 2015:72

Printed by NTNU Grafisk senter

## Content

<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>6</b>
1.1. Why au pair research? .....	12
1.2. Research questions.....	15
<b>2. Summary of the articles</b> .....	<b>18</b>
2.1. ‘It’s not much’: Affective (boundary) work in the au pair scheme .....	19
2.2. From intimate relations to citizenship? Au pairing and the potential for (straight) citizenship in Norway .....	23
2.3. Framing the au pair. Problems of sex, work and motherhood in Norwegian au pair documentaries .....	27
<b>3. Au pairing and live-in migrant domestic work</b> .....	<b>32</b>
3.1. Au pairing in Norway: Legal framework and cultural meanings.....	34
3.2. The genealogy of au pairing .....	39
3.3. Host families in the ‘equality-orientated’ welfare state .....	42
3.4. Au pairing as a migration route .....	46
3.5. ‘Cultural exchange’ and labour negotiations as ‘part of the family’ .....	50
3.6. Au pairs’ relationships .....	56
3.7. Class, race, ethnicity and gender in au pairing.....	57
3.8. Conclusion.....	63
<b>4. Intersectionality at work</b> .....	<b>65</b>
4.1. Domestic work and carework, work and labour .....	67

4.2.	Situated intersectionality.....	69
4.3.	Processes of marginalisation in au pair work .....	73
4.4.	The home and the nation .....	83
4.5.	Concluding remarks.....	86
<b>5.</b>	<b>The site of au pairing and mixed and messy methods .....</b>	<b>90</b>
5.1.	Where to start learning?.....	93
5.2.	Looking in other places.....	94
5.3.	Finding informants for qualitative interviews .....	95
5.4.	Loosely structured interaction and attention to affect .....	97
5.5.	The importance of location .....	100
5.6.	Subject positions, sensitive issues and coherent stories .....	101
5.7.	Embodied knowledge .....	103
5.8.	The darling's in the details .....	105
5.9.	Film analysis .....	106
5.10.	Analysis and representation .....	107
<b>6.</b>	<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>111</b>
6.1.	The many practices of au pairing .....	112
6.2.	The home and the nation: Gender equality and nationalism.....	116
6.3.	Solutions? .....	119
	<b>References .....</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>7.</b>	<b>'It's not much': Affective (boundary) work in the au pair scheme</b>	<b>134</b>
7.1.	Au pairing in Norway.....	135
7.2.	Affective labour and boundary work .....	136
7.3.	Analysing affect .....	137

7.4. Affective au pairing .....	138
Evelyn .....	138
Inez .....	142
Gabriela .....	144
7.5. Processes of ‘othering’ and strategies of boundary work .....	146
7.6. ‘It’s not much’ as affective boundary work? .....	148
References .....	150

**8. From intimate relations to citizenship? Au pairing and the potential for (straight) citizenship in Norway..... 152**

8.1. Formal, informal and intimate (heterosexual) citizenship .....	156
8.2. Analysing cultural narratives of intimacy .....	159
8.2.1. Queering independence .....	160
8.2.2. Marrying ‘dad’ .....	163
8.2.3. The limits of belonging .....	165
8.2.4. Agency in informal citizenship .....	168
8.3. Promising intimacy? .....	171
References .....	174

**9. Framing the au pair. Problems of sex, work and motherhood in Norwegian au pair documentaries..... 178**

9.1. Material and analytical perspectives .....	180
9.2. Theoretical perspectives .....	183
9.2.1. Global care chains .....	183
9.2.2. The exotic in the domestic .....	185
9.3. Framing problems: Displacement of care, trafficking and sexual abuse .....	186
9.3.1. Displacement of care .....	186
9.3.2. Sex(ualisation) in the au pair scheme .....	189
9.4. Representing problems and problematic representations .....	194

References.....198

Appendix 1: Long interview guide..... 202

Appendix 2: Short interview guide ..... 206

## Summary

This thesis looks at au pairing in contemporary Norway. Norway has gone from being a sending country to a receiving country of au pairs over the past 20-25 years. Public understanding of the scheme has changed accordingly, from an au pair to a host perspective. The notion of au pairing as ‘cultural exchange’ rather than work migration has persisted through this shift, and serves as a cultural and legal legitimisation for the current practice of hiring affordable live-in domestic workers in Norway. Consequently, the domestic work and carework au pairs do is not acknowledged as *work*, with the lack of rights that entails.

The thesis critically investigates the domestic labour and affective boundary work au pairing entails, possibilities of migration and citizenship through au pairing, and the cultural representations and cultural conditions of au pairing in Norway. Through interviews with au pairs and participant observation in the homes where they work, as well as analysis of documentary films, the following questions are investigated: How do au pairs understand au pairing? How does the figure of the au pair get produced in Norwegian media representations? How is au pairing constituted simultaneously as work and non-work? What forms does agency take for au pairs? Which processes of marginalisation, inclusion and exclusion become active in producing au pairing and the figure of the au pair?

The dissertation includes three academic articles and a synthesising chapter. The first article, ‘It’s not much’. Affective (boundary) work in the au pair scheme’, argues that affective labour and boundary work are part of the domestic and carework au pairs do in their host families’ home. Drawing on interviews with current and former au pairs, the article investigates the statement ‘it’s not much’ as a way of affectively negating the extent or the drudgery of live-in domestic work.

The second article, ‘From intimate relations to citizenship? Au pairing and the potential for (straight) citizenship in Norway’ looks at the possibilities for formal

and informal citizenship through intimate relations in the au pair scheme. Through au pairs' narratives of dating, the article argues that while citizenship can be performed culturally and relationally as well as gained formally, there is a sense of cruel optimism to the prospect of au pairing as a migration route where au pairs have individual agency, as migration is always governed from above.

The third article, 'Framing the au pair. Problems of sex, work and motherhood in Norwegian au pair documentaries' analyses two television documentaries about au pairs in Norway. It argues that au pairs are naturalised as vulnerable, yet sexually available Filipina women, who are also poor enough to do the labour under the present conditions. In doing this, the films also carve out a space to argue that au pairs from the global south should be outlawed for their own good.

Read together, the three articles shed light on the ways in which various power structures intersect. By performing undervalued labour, traditionally done, unpaid, by women, au pairs get produced as a particular kind of migrant worker. The articles show how au pairs get marginalised when gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, visa status, age, and religion intersect in the activity of paid domestic labour.

## Acknowledgements

Firstly, I want to express my gratitude to my informants: you all told me stories about yourselves, some of you introduced me to your friends, some of you invited me into your host families' homes, but all of you provided me generously with your narratives and introduced me to your world, and for this I am grateful. I am also grateful to the host families who let me into your homes. Thanks to friends, family, colleagues, acquaintances, and stakeholders in the au pair scheme who helped me in the recruitment process.

This thesis was written as a part of the larger umbrella project *Buying and selling (gender) equality* (BSGE), funded by the Norwegian Research Council's program Welfare, Working Life and Migration (VAM). I am very grateful to the project group I have been privileged enough to work with over the past years; Trine Annfelt, Berit Gullikstad, Guro Korsnes Kristensen, Malin Noem Ravn, and Priscilla Ringrose.

My 'home' has been at the Center for Gender Studies, where I have had the most wonderful and generous colleagues who have also read and commented on text. In addition to those mentioned above, I want to thank: Deniz Akin, Agnes Bolsø, Ane Møller Gabrielsen, Anette Hoel, Anja Johansen, Lise Kanckos, Merete Lie, Manuela Perrotta, Kristin Spilker, Stine H. Bang Svendsen, Siri Øyslebø Sørensen, and Ingvild Kvale Sørensen.

I am also grateful for having had the chance to publish chapters in two anthologies. *'Au pairs' lives in global context: Sisters or Servants?* edited by Rosie Cox (2015) is the first anthology on au pairs, and the feedback I received on my chapter greatly helped me to tune the overall focus of this thesis. I would also like to thank Malin Noem Ravn for reading an early version of this chapter. The second anthology, *'Paid Domestic Work in a Changing Europe. Questions of Gender Equality and Citizenship'*, is edited by Gullikstad, Korsnes and Ringrose (forthcoming). Here, I have had the pleasure of working together with a group of

international scholars that have all provided very helpful feedback on the text 'From intimate relations to citizenship'.

I also want to thank Tina Sæteraas Stoum, Ingvill Stuvøy, Eirik Swensen, as well as the two anonymous reviewers and the editors of *NORA* for inspiring and helpful comments on 'Framing the au pair'. The participants at Kjønnforskning NÅ in Stavanger 2013, and especially Hanne Haavind, provided food for thoughts on a draft versions of the article 'From intimate relations to citizenship'. Jennie Clancy and Kamilla Krogtoft deserve a big thank you for providing prompt and precise transcriptions. Finally, I want to thank Priscilla Ringrose for our collaboration on an article that did not make it to this thesis, but which was both fun to work with as well as teaching me a lot about writing. Thank you also for your invaluable help towards the final stages of my thesis writing.

The following institutions have contributed in various ways: The Au Pair Center in Oslo, who do a fantastic job for au pairs in Norway, has been providing me with information as well as inviting me to their conference on au pairs in 2013. Babaylan DK invited me to Nordisk Forum in Malmö 2014 to speak at their workshop, and generously shared their perspectives on au pairing. Furthermore, during the autumn of 2014 I spent three months as a visiting scholar at The Institute for Gender, Equality and Difference at the University of Iceland. I am grateful for this opportunity, and also for the invitation to hold a public lecture during my stay.

I would like to thank Eli-Nann and Trond for cheering along the way, always, and for not asking too many questions. Also thanks to Gun and Terje for letting me hide in their cabin for a very long time, and to Anja and Henrik for equipping me with a car when I needed it the most. And thanks to Lionel, Elias and Anita for thought-provoking conversations and for making my stay in Iceland a thoroughly enjoyable experience.

I also want to thank my supervisors; Berit Gullikstad for being with me from day one, for the patience and knowledge, and for being a great sparring partner. Thanks to Rosie Cox for the personal and professional generosity and for providing feedback that is always both exciting and challenging. I am very grateful for having had the chance to work with you both.

Finally, I want to thank my partner, Stine H. Bang Svendsen. For reading, editing, then reading and editing some more, for thinking with me, and for generally being so inspiring and enthusiastic. Thank you also for facilitating life outside the thesis, at the same time as planning for the great outdoors. And finally, thanks for making everything feel possible.

Trondheim, March 2015

Elisabeth Stubberud

## 1. Introduction

Au pairs are not labour migrants, yet they work. They do not get paid a salary, yet they pay tax to the state. Although they do domestic work, they are not domestic workers. They are not students, yet they are supposed to learn. And even though what they are supposed to learn is the Norwegian language, they are expected to return home after their visas run out rather than remain in a place where that language can be used. They are at home, yet not their own home.

These inherent contradictions in au pairing, as the au pair scheme is practiced in Norway today, are easily visible. Au pairing is not a new phenomenon, but the way it has been practised has changed over the past 20 to 25 years. Norway has transitioned from a country that exports au pairs to one that primarily receives them.

Au pairs travel to Norway from countries all over the world, including Europe. They are between the ages of 18 and 30, and, in exchange for pocket money, Norwegian classes and board and lodging with a host family, they are expected to do light housework and childcare for up to 30 hours a week. Structurally, au pairing provides a highly gendered migration route, and it is carried out almost exclusively by women travelling from countries that are poorer than Norway. While 158 au pair visas were issued in 1994, this number rose to 1,476 in 2013, with the majority issued to women from the Philippines.<sup>1</sup> Whether au pairs migrate to earn money or to experience life in a different country, global inequality informs their practice. Au pairing offers one of very few migration routes to Norway, and rests upon the premise that the migrant is willing to work for very little money and with few formal citizenship rights. Host families who hire au pairs do so out of need or desire for extra help in the house, and have the financial means to pay for it.

---

<sup>1</sup> Personal communication with Minja Tea Dzamarija at Statistics Norway, 15.12.2014.

The meanings au pairing is attributed in the public sphere has shifted as Norway has become a 'host nation' rather than a sending nation. What was once considered a popular way for young Norwegians to travel abroad, learn a new language, and experience new things whilst living with a host family, now takes on different meanings. From a Norwegian perspective, it is a matter of changing positions; from the au pair, to the host family, where au pairing now appears to be an affordable way for families to acquire live-in domestic help. Implicitly or explicitly, the media employ a host perspective on the au pair scheme and address issues related to the scheme in a tone of social responsibility within a national framework. The nation is imagined as 'host' through a symbolic extension of the Norwegian families who hire au pairs.

The way in which au pairing is conceptualised and represented in the public sphere is important in shaping au pair legislation, as well as au pairs' daily lives. While unskilled work migration to Norway is not possible from countries outside the European Union and Schengen Area, au pairs can still live and work in Norwegian homes, taking the load off busy, career-orientated parents under the heading of 'cultural exchange'.<sup>2</sup>

In this thesis, I discuss how au pairing is understood by au pairs and how au pairing and the figure of the au pair are produced by the Norwegian media. These two angles provide different perspectives on au pairing. I discuss au pairs' understandings based on in-depth interviews with them and participant observation in homes in which au pairs work. Through an analysis of au pair documentaries screened on Norwegian television, I also present popular understandings of au pairing and discuss the documentaries' production of au pairing and the figure of the au pair. I combine analyses of au pairs' narratives and media representations of the au pair scheme to explore the cultural meanings of au pairing, and the way in which au pairing is constituted simultaneously as

---

<sup>2</sup> For a full overview of the au pair scheme in Norway, see section 3.1., 'Au pairing in Norway: Legal framework and cultural meanings'.

work and non-work. A further concern in the analyses is the forms agency takes for au pairs, and, connected to this, the processes of marginalisation, inclusion and exclusion that are activated through au pairing. I am interested in how au pairs *do* au pairing, not just in terms of the labour they carry out in the host families' homes, but also in their negotiations of place in Norwegian society.

In practice, in legislation and in media representations, au pairing seems to be pulled between the two positions of work and cultural exchange, and there is constant tension between these poles. Au pairs draw on these positions in their understandings of the scheme. Some see their work mainly as live-in domestic work and others see it as a form of cultural exchange; still others see au pairing as a stepping-stone for future migration. Host families may or may not share their au pair's understanding of the work, which can be a source of conflict.

Au pairs in Norway have varying degrees of knowledge of and interest in the country. Yet, regardless of au pairs' prior knowledge, the backdrop of Norway plays a part in the practice of au pairing. Au pairs who come to Norway arrive in a Northern European country of approximately 5 million people, with 17 inhabitants per square kilometre. Just over 600,000 people live in the capital of Oslo. Since the discovery of oil in Norway in 1969, the petroleum industry has contributed significantly to economic growth in the country. Currently, the average household disposable income per capita is \$32,093 USD a year, compared to the OECD average of \$23,938 USD (OECD, 2014). Unemployment is low and life satisfaction is high, even if economic differences between people in Norway are increasing (ibid.). The middle- or upper-class families that au pairs generally live with often have substantial economic privileges, yet not necessarily a strong self-awareness of these privileges. In contemporary Norway, servitude is, to some extent, still associated with indecent displays of wealth and represented as shameful (Døving & Klepp, 2010).

These cultural conditions contribute to significant political tension around the au pair scheme. It has been pulled into question as a potentially morally and politically dubious arrangement, although the political will to change it has been lacking. The au pair scheme is produced as culturally and legally legitimate through the idea that it is a form of 'cultural exchange', combined with an expectation of class mobility. The idea that young women can enter into domestic service for a few years to improve their economic position and achieve upward class mobility is readily available as a frame of understanding. The practice of becoming a domestic worker for a shorter or longer period was common among the working class and rural poor women until at least the 1950s (Danielsen, 2013, p. 254). Yet domestic service in Norway became less common in the decades after World War II, as both supply and demand decreased (Alsos & Eldrin, 2010, p. 378).

When the Council of Europe's Au Pair Agreement was formalised in 1969, Norwegian girls travelling abroad as au pairs could be understood to be continuing an established practice of temporary domestic service. However, by the 1970s, the social democratic project of economic equality and equal opportunity had constituted domestic service within Norway as inappropriate; nonetheless, because the idea of au pairing as cultural exchange had been maintained, young Norwegian women could still travel abroad without encountering stigma. Today, the notion of cultural exchange is used to produce a smokescreen that hides unequal class relations from Norwegian authorities, as well as from some au pairs and host families. The various reasons held by the actors involved for avoiding the confrontation of inequality is a topic I return to in my discussion of au pairs' agency and opportunities for social and geographic mobility, which is also relevant for understanding the cultural politics of au pairing in Norway.

The project of equality and sameness in the Nordics in the latter part of the 20th century was decidedly nationalist as well as racially informed. The Nordic social

democratic project produced a 'folk' based on notions of equality and sameness, which the region struggles with today (Hübinette & Lundström, 2011; Keskinen, Tuori, Irni, & Mulinari, 2009; Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012). Although gender was addressed forcefully as an illegitimate ground for discrimination in the 1960s, the issue of race was constituted as foreign – a social problem that existed in South Africa and the United States, only (Gullestad, 2002). Today, racialised women who come to Norway as au pairs encounter a society that has limited understanding of racism because it is seen as irrelevant in a nation based on 'equality', even though its very concept of equality is grounded in racial similarity.

Gender equality has been culturalised as an inherent trait of Nordic culture, in particular, and implicitly also racialised as a faculty of Nordic whiteness (Svendsen, 2014). In relation to otherwise racialised subjects, the white ethnic Nordic subject is constituted as inherently gender equal (Keskinen, 2011; Gavanoas 2006). Nevertheless, there is a great deal of tension within Norwegian society over the actual inequality between women and men, both within heterosexual couples and in society more generally. Frustration over men's unwillingness to share domestic work is frequently listed by host mothers as a reason for employing an au pair. Even if hiring an au pair appears to resolve the problem of inequality for the ethnic Norwegian man and woman, this solution clearly serves to reinforce the gendered division of labour in the household, at the expense of another woman.

An au pair brings class and other forms of inequality into the host family, and often involves the establishment of a traditional patriarchal household, which includes servants. It also relies on the racialisation of the au pair, through the idea that her employers are doing her a favour, because equality is unavailable to her in her position as an 'always already oppressed' woman of colour (Mohanty, 1988). The impact of racism on the au pair's life in Norway is a recurring theme in this thesis. In extension of this, the site of domestic labour illustrates with particular clarity the symbolic and practical connection between home, family

and nation (Collins, 1998). To gain legitimacy in the household, the live-in domestic worker must be constituted as 'part of the family'; this also links her to the metaphoric kinship of the nation, however temporarily. I return to this issue at several points in this thesis, in my exploration of the cultural meanings of au pairing. What does au pairing tap in to that seems to make it so desirable yet simultaneously so dysfunctional for so many of those involved? What resources do au pairs draw on to handle all of the above?

This introductory chapter consists of six parts, and the overall goals are to flesh out the background of the choice of topic and to introduce and supplement the three articles that make up the main body of this thesis. In this first part of the introductory chapter, I introduce au pairing as a topic of research, more generally. I discuss the umbrella project that this thesis is part of, then introduce the research questions for this study. The foci of the thesis are: how au pairing is understood by au pairs, how au pairing is represented in the public sphere, how it is constituted as work and non-work, what forms agency takes for au pairs and, finally, which processes of marginalisation, inclusion and exclusion produce au pairing and the figure of the au pair. These questions inform the articles, which I summarise in part two.

Each of the three articles focuses on au pairs. Although 'au pairing' is an ambiguous term, the au pair scheme – both legislatively and conceptually – provides a structure and legitimacy to au pairs' employment, living arrangements and migration. The first article, "It's not much": Affective (boundary) work in the au pair scheme', investigates (domestic) work, affective labour and boundary work as part of au pairing. Au pairs must carry out the affective and emotional labour involved in carework, but they must also affectively deal with a fall in social status as a result of their work. In the second article, 'From intimate relations to citizenship? Au pairing and the potential for (straight) citizenship in Norway', I focus on migration and citizenship. Here, I discuss the possibilities of formal and informal citizenship through au pairing by looking at au pairs'

relationships – partly with host families, but more importantly with romantic interests or partners through stories of dating. In the third article, ‘Framing the au pair. Problems of sex, work and motherhood in Norwegian au pair documentaries’, I turn to representations. Here, I analyse two Norwegian au pair documentaries and argue that they frame au pairs as mothers who are frequently exploited, and naturalise au pairs as Filipinas.

In part three of this introductory chapter, I turn to cultural meanings, media representations and the specific rules and regulations that shape au pairing in Norway – in short, the wider field of au pairing. I discuss these issues in light of previous research on au pairs that motivated my own work. Here, I map out some of the specificities of au pairing, such as the particular migration route it sometimes provides, labour negotiations and live-in domestic work, au pairs’ relationships, host families’ perspectives on au pairing and, finally, the impact of class, race, ethnicity and gender on au pairing.

Discussion of the latter is continued in part four, in which I focus specifically on intersectionality at work in the au pair scheme. I use the concept of intersectionality to deliberate the overall theoretical contribution of this thesis. In part five, I address the use of mixed and messy methodology, the challenges of gathering data, the combination of interviews with participant observation and film analysis, and the process of analysis and representation. In part six, I conclude this introductory chapter with a discussion of the overall contribution of this thesis, and I return to the home and the nation, as well as to the production of equality and sameness, as made visible through au pairing.

### **1.1. Why au pair research?**

In this thesis, I study au pairs and the au pair scheme. As suggested above, these objects of study are less clear-cut than they may seem. The connecting point, ‘au pair’, is, in a sense, a fictitious term. It is not a category of women or workers that is clearly identifiable. It is partly a visa category and partly a label that the people

involved put on themselves, their employment relation or their migration, travel or living arrangement. Furthermore, au pairing is imagined as something temporary – a form of life-cycle service. The label, then, provides a peculiar structure to something that is sometimes a gap year, sometimes employment, sometimes a migration strategy but always some degree of domestic work. And although au pairing generally refers back to the 1969 agreement (Liarou, 2015), its meanings constantly shift. The au pair scheme appears, in other words, simultaneously self-explanatory and vague, and it is an interesting object of study for this reason.

This thesis sprang out of a larger umbrella project, ‘Buying and selling (gender) equality: Feminized migration and gender equality in contemporary Norway’ (BSGE Research Group, 2015). I described, above, the dilemma of foreign women performing paid domestic work and carework in a society that prides itself on gender equality, and the name of the project points directly towards this contradiction. The project investigates the relation between gender equality as a value, policy and practice in Norway and what looks like an increasing dependence on the feminised migration of domestic workers and au pairs, and questions whether this contradicts the welfare state’s objectives of equality. The umbrella project looks at three different sites: Norwegian couples who employ or choose not to employ domestic workers (Kristensen, 2015), public discourses on buying and selling domestic services (Gullikstad & Annfelt, forthcoming) and, finally, the women offering domestic services.

The project description for the PhD project focuses on the latter – namely, those selling domestic services – and it was pre-given that this project would involve qualitative, in-depth interviews with au pairs and/or domestic workers to gain insight into their role in host families and their work in Norway. I decided early on to focus on au pairs, and there are several reasons for this. As prior au pair research indicates, au pairing may, in many cases, be quite different to other kinds of domestic work (see part three, ‘Au pairing and live-in migrant domestic

work', for greater discussion of this). Furthermore, the formal framing of au pairing as something inherently different to domestic work – not as a reality but as a construction, wherein the idea (I) of cultural exchange is important – raises specific issues and apparent contradictions between the two forms of paid domestic labour. The fact that au pairs live in their workplace while other kinds of domestic workers in Norway do not, and that au pairs may or may not self-identify as domestic workers, raises important questions about the meanings and identities associated with this form of domestic work. As I was interested in questions about work from the beginning, this inherent contradiction regarding work in the au pair scheme was fascinating to explore, in itself. The contradiction would not have been present in the same way amongst people employed explicitly as cleaners. For these reasons, I chose not to interview other kinds of domestic workers, despite facing recruitment challenges with au pairs, as I discuss later (see part five, 'The site of au pairing and mixed and messy methods').

Some of the core questions of the umbrella project are particularly relevant to issues connected to au pairing, and I list some of these core questions below to make explicit the starting point and premise this thesis was built on.

- What understandings of gender, gender equality, class, race and ethnicity lie at the core of the practice of buying and selling domestic services?
- Does the national preoccupation with gender mainstreaming produce new social inequalities at the expense of reducing others?
- Who is gender equality for?
- Could middle-class families' purchase of domestic services also imply the legitimisation of class divisions in Norwegian society in the name of gender equality? If so, is this division by class made invisible by the fact that it is primarily women from ethnic minorities who sell these services?
- Is domestic work still a core activity of doing gender?

Behind these questions lie a set of presumptions: that national discourses and practices of gender equality do not exist in a vacuum but should be seen in relation to other social categories, such as race, ethnicity and class; and that these categories are not stable, but are rather performed. I return to these questions in the conclusion (see part six, 'Conclusion'). The questions from the umbrella project partly informed my own research questions, but the questions I ask specifically in this thesis were also informed by existing research on au pairing and other kinds of domestic work and carework, and partly informed by my interest in the meanings of domestic work and carework in contemporary Norway. In the following, I outline these research questions.

### **1.2. Research questions**

In this study, I aimed to do at least two things: gain detailed knowledge of the au pair scheme from au pairs' perspective and explore what au pairing is and does in the Norwegian public sphere, as well as how it is produced as a contested object. Against the backdrop of the welfare state and ideas and ideals of (gender) equality, I investigated the follow questions:

- **How is au pairing understood by au pairs?**

In order to answer this question I carried out in-depth interviews with current and former au pairs, as well as some participant observation of au pairs at the host families' houses during a normal day. I explored a wide range of issues, including the way in which au pairs describe and conceptualise their own work, their reasons for migrating, the things they left behind and their plans for the future. I answer this question primarily in the first article, "It's not much", and in the second article, 'From intimate relations to citizenship?'. I argue that au pairs have a wide range of understandings of au pairing, depending on their motivation, background and personal and material resources.

- **How are au pairing and the figure of the au pair produced in Norwegian media representations?**

I answer this question in the third article, 'Framing the au pair', through an analysis of two television documentaries that focus exclusively on au pairs. These documentaries provide some very rich representations of au pairs, as imagined in the Norwegian public sphere. Without suggesting any direct connection, I highlight the changes in au pair legislation that followed the documentaries, which are both very problem-orientated. Based on these analyses, I argue that the public construction of au pairs relies on a global care chains logic, wherein the au pair is constructed both as a self-sacrificing mother and an exotic Oriental woman. I also argue that the films locate the responsibility for the failure of the au pair scheme with au pairs.

- **How is au pairing constituted simultaneously as work and non-work?**

In answering this question, which I do primarily in the first article, "It's not much", as well as in part four of this introductory chapter, 'Intersectionality at work', I draw mainly on the interview material and participant observation, in light of former research. The discrepancy between au pair legislation – suggesting cultural exchange – and au pair practice – wherein host families hire au pairs because they want or need help in the house – means that the production of au pairing as work or non-work is a key issue in the scheme. I argue that au pairs do a great deal of negotiation regarding work, and also that a significant part of au pairing revolves around au pairs negotiating their position in the family; this negotiation involves either a loss of social status and/or a loss of professional integrity. Some au pairs may find it difficult to negotiate work because taking on an identity of domestic worker means making explicit the downward class mobility and racialisation that seems to be part of au pair work.

- **What forms does agency take for au pairs?**

I answer this question primarily in the second article of this thesis, 'From intimate relations to citizenship?'. Here, I frame agency in terms of citizenship (as opposed to many other forms of agency au pairs may have) and draw on interview material that captured au pairs' plans for the future, their desire to stay in Norway and the role of their boyfriends and social networks in providing them with formal and informal citizenship. In answering this question, I try to balance structural obstacles with the agency my informants described in the interviews.

- **Which processes of marginalisation, inclusion and exclusion become active in producing au pairing and the figure of the au pair?**

I answer this question throughout the three articles, but also in part four of this introductory chapter, 'Intersectionality at work'. Here, I summarise the various social structures that are involved in the au pair scheme and discuss their interaction, arguing that the au pair scheme is contextually produced and both builds on and reinforces existing social and structural inequalities.

In the following part, I briefly discuss and summarise the articles that make up the bulk of this thesis.

## 2. Summary of the articles

The three articles of this thesis centre on three aspects of au pairing: (domestic) work, affective labour and boundary work; migration and citizenship; and cultural representations and the cultural conditions for au pairing. All of the articles focus on and investigate aspects of the au pair scheme. The first two articles, “It’s not much” and ‘From intimate relations to citizenship?’, draw on the same empirical material – namely in-depth interviews with current and former au pairs as well as participant observation. The third article, ‘Framing the au pair’, primarily draws on two au pair documentaries that were shown on national Norwegian television. The topic of the first article sprang out of the empirical material; it was clear early on that issues connected to work and what au pairs actually do in the homes in which they live and work would have to be discussed. In the second article, I explicitly view au pairing as a migration route and investigate, through narratives about plans for the future that surfaced in the interview material, au pairs’ possibilities and forms of agency in relation to formal and informal citizenship. The topic of the third article comes from a slightly different place; after writing drafts of the first two articles, I wanted to explore further the different ways in which power hierarchies and processes of marginalisation factor into au pairing. Around the same time, the documentary *Herskap og tenarar* was televised, and, as I watched it, I realised that something had to be said about the cultural conditions of au pairing. Both au pairs and host families do, after all, live in a specific cultural context, which they draw on in understanding their situation. While au pair legislation is essential in shaping the conditions for au pairs, the cultural conditions – which the media’s framing of au pairs partly creates – also play a big part.

The articles in this thesis shed light on the organising principle of au pair legislation and the idea of the au pair scheme, as well as on wider issues connected to the gendering and ethnicisation of labour, migration routes and

strategies, and the cultural conditions that produce or encourage certain narratives, acts and understandings over others. In the following, I present a brief summary of the articles in the order in which they appear in the thesis.

### **2.1. 'It's not much': Affective (boundary) work in the au pair scheme**

The first article (Stubberud, 2015) was written as part of an international anthology on au pairs, *Au Pairs' Lives in Global Context*, edited by Rosie Cox (2015). In the article, I argue that the domestic work and carework that au pairs carry out is affective labour, and that the unclear situation for au pairs produces the need for a certain amount of boundary work to draw lines between – for example – work and leisure, and the au pairs and the host family. The article discusses the labour au pairs perform, which slides between carework, service work and domestic work – all of which are part of the inherently ambiguous definition and practice of au pairing. The topic of the article sprang out of an interest in the apparent dichotomy between cultural exchange and domestic work, which seem to be co-existing motivations amongst au pairs, and the question of work was an angle from which this dichotomy could be approached.

Au pairing relies on a quasi-familial relationship, wherein au pairs are 'family members' who merely contribute to the household by doing their 'fair share' of domestic work for pocket money, board and lodging. This fair share is, according to legislation, 30 hours of domestic work and childcare per week. When I asked my informants to tell me about their work, all 15 of them said at some point during the interview that it was 'not much'. However, this claim was often complicated by revelations of extensive task lists and long hours. In addition, the interviews showed that a less tangible affective labour was performed that nevertheless seemed to be a necessary part of their role. In this article I ask: Is the statement 'it's not much' a way of affectively negating the extent or drudgery of the labour involved in au pairing? How can this statement be seen in relation to

wider social inequalities that underpin the au pair scheme and the labour it consists of?

Drawing on the concepts of affective boundary work and affective labour, I examine the ways in which au pairs navigate and negotiate unclear boundaries between domestic worker and family member. I discuss the way in which affective labour, defined here as the effort put into the psychosocial aspects of au pairing, figures in au pairs' stories of work while drawing on Margaret Wetherell (2012) and Encarnación Rodríguez's (2008) definitions of affect as a merging of bodies, feelings, thoughts, narratives, interpretive repertoires, talk and text. Affective labour does not necessarily register consciously as work, but rather as energy spent on being in the world or in the space of one's work.

Three au pair stories are analysed in depth, and these stories were selected because they convey particularly strong affective intensity connected to the issue of work. In the analysis of the interviews with Evelyn, Inez and Gabriela, I examine the affective labour that surfaced, the affective boundary work that was done and the way in which that work was done. Evelyn had trouble adjusting to her role as a cleaner, and the downward class mobility she was experiencing required a degree of affective labour. She was affectively invested in the children of the host family, yet her investments appeared excessive and, as a result, she was fired. Inez's story shows that the domestic worker is considered easily replaceable, in stark contrast to a family member. Furthermore, as her visa depended on her relationship with the host family, Inez was suppressing her personal thoughts, feelings and opinions in the house. Keeping things to herself, however, also allowed her to deal with the risk of affective investment and to maintain a professional distance from the host family. Gabriela's story is another tale of negotiating downward class mobility and replaceability. Yet Gabriela's strategy of dealing with her situation involved distancing herself from the work and reproducing a racialised hierarchy of domestic work and childcare: Gabriela

did not deem herself fit to be a maid because she was a white European, not an Asian woman.

In this article, I lay down the basis for acknowledging the 30+ hours per week of work that au pairs put in as actual labour worth paying for. The affective and emotional labour of living and working in the same place, having a quasi-familial relationship with one's employers while simultaneously depending on them for a visa, and negotiating a hierarchy of tasks in which cleaning is lowest and most often part of au pairs' work, merely adds to the hours of expected labour. I argue that the au pair scheme produces an unclear situation wherein au pairs move between the role of family member, friend, domestic worker and even stranger. For au pairs, the quasi-familial relationship feeds directly into negotiations over work. For a family member, housework is not work and pocket money is not a salary. This means that au pairs do not have to think about themselves as domestic workers. What it does mean, however, is that it becomes very difficult to distinguish between working hours and time off, because these labels do not work within the private household. Au pairs, in effect, must be available all the time, and might discover, as several of my informants did, that when they try to negotiate tasks and hours with the host family, they are simply told to 'take it or leave it'. Host families thus have clear negotiating power over au pairs.

Experiences of 'othering' within the host families undoubtedly hurt – especially for those au pairs who expect to be equal to, or part of, the host family – and I argue that the au pair scheme, itself, produces a hierarchical relationship that exists independently of actual similarities between the au pair and the host family. The label 'migrant domestic worker' is a gendered, classed and racialised term (Chow, 2002), and thus also stigmatising (A. M. Williams & Baláz, 2004). Gabriela's story is an interesting illustration of how an au pair might, unintentionally, become not only a domestic worker, but also a migrant domestic worker upon arrival in Norway. For those who do not see themselves as migrant domestic workers, the label might feel offensive, as it highlights what appears to

be an unexpected and unwanted downward class mobility that is also connected to a process of racialisation. In Gabriela's case, she argued that Asian women would be better suited to cleaning than she was. Inez, on the other hand, might have used the label of 'domestic worker' strategically in a struggle for better working conditions, or as a strategy to gain a form of professional identity that might also serve to 'tidy up' some of the obfuscation that is inherent to au pairing.

Based on the analysis of the three au pair stories, I identify two types of affective boundary work that au pairs carry out to cope with processes of othering. First, au pairs may create a boundary between themselves and their work by arguing that they are unfit (or rather overqualified) for the tasks they are given. Alternatively, au pairs may create a boundary between themselves and the host family in an attempt at professionalisation, by 'erasing' their own personalities and focusing solely on the job. Regardless of the strategy, however, it is difficult – if not impossible – for au pairs to be equal to the host family when they are only given the most denigrated work.

I conclude the article by returning to the statement 'it's not much' and arguing that this claim can be interpreted as a negation of the extent and type of work that au pairs are given. Yet such statements may also serve as a strategy used by au pairs to distance themselves from work that may or may not feel degrading, but is always undervalued and underpaid when practiced within the frames of au pairing. The statement could also be interpreted as an attempt at professionalisation that simultaneously distances the worker from the host family – who, in this process, becomes the employer. Given that host families hire au pairs because they want or need an (affordable) domestic worker, au pairs – regardless of whether their motivation is work migration or cultural exchange – are in a no-win position. Those motivated by work migration end up being underpaid and undervalued, and those motivated by cultural exchange must affectively negotiate the fact that they are not desired as family members, but

rather as 'workers'. Affective boundary work thus seems an inherent part of au pairing, because the women perform low-status domestic work without necessarily identifying as domestic workers. Even if they do identify as domestic workers, they are not formally recognised as such, and receive less favourable labour conditions. The claim of 'it's not much' might thus be seen as an expression of minimal physical, as well as psychological, investment in the work.

## **2.2. From intimate relations to citizenship? Au pairing and the potential for (straight) citizenship in Norway**

The second article (Stubberud, forthcoming) is part of an edited anthology, *Paid Domestic Labour in a Changing Europe: Questions of Gender Equality and Gendered Citizenship*, edited by Berit Gullikstad, Guro K. Kristensen and Priscilla Ringrose (forthcoming), and addresses questions of gender equality and gendered citizenship. The overall theme of the book provided me with an interesting focal point for my own material and, in particular, enabled me to look more closely at au pairing as a migration route through the concept of citizenship. In the article, I look at access to formal and informal rights through au pairing, as these rights are imagined or manifested through au pairs' intimate relationships with host families, friends or partners in Norway. In other words, the article looks at the processes of using au pairing as a migration route and the potential for formal and informal citizenship through intimate relations in a context in which formal rights are lacking.

Out of the 15 au pairs I interviewed, only three stated explicitly that they wanted to return home upon the end of their contract; all others had either already stayed on or were looking for ways of doing so, which reflects a broader trend wherein approximately half of all au pairs on au pair visas return to Norway on a different visa category after au pairing. Two years is, after all, a substantial amount of time to familiarise oneself with a place, learn the language and create a network that might provide a basis for staying. There is also reason to think that

my informants' high level of education would have helped them make this decision – both because it would have made it easier for them to find work and because navigating through, for example, study options and the migration process requires a certain skill level. Furthermore, during the interviews, we discussed the decision or desire to stay on in Norway, and it was especially when talking about these themes that stories of partners or potential partners came up. Drawing on my informants' stories, this article explores au pairs' narratives and looks at what they can teach us about formal and informal citizenship through intimate relations.

My informants' opportunities for staying in Norway were closely intertwined with personal and intimate relationships. Their narratives around this topic took a highly gendered form, in which heterosexuality seemed to be a prerequisite. I use the concept of 'intimate citizenship' to capture relational routes to formal and informal citizenship rights in the imagined community of the nation (Plummer, 2003). The au pairs' narratives – or fantasies – of staying seemed largely to rely on the 'heterosexual contract' (Butler, 1999; Wittig, 1989), through which host families were imagined to be replaced by husbands as a route to formal rights and informal belonging. Family is a key symbolic structure for belonging in the nation, and becoming 'part of the family' in a literal sense through marriage is a way of acquiring legal, as well as affective, citizenship (Fortier, 2008).

In the article, I distinguish between 'formal citizenship' and 'informal citizenship'. The former is defined as the right to reside in a nation through attachment to an existing member or through labour (L. Williams, 2010). 'Informal citizenship' is defined as a dimension of cultural membership in a national community connected to practices of identity and belonging (Bauder, 2008). Yet the concepts of formal and informal citizenship do not take into account gendered, intimate and relational aspects, nor are they particularly useful for addressing the intersection between the private and public realms of individual life or the social relations between people that often mediate an

individual's relationship to the state (Eggebo, 2012). However, drawing on the concept of intimate citizenship (Plummer, 2003), it is possible to grasp the public, as well as the private, dimensions of citizenship both for those with formal citizenship rights and for those without or with limited formal citizenship.

In the article, I analyse the stories of Marian, Imelda, Sonya and Paulina. Marian, a former au pair, had a host mum who was a little more engaged in her dating than Marian seemed to appreciate. Yet Marian found a partner without her host mum's help; the partner was a pensioner about twice Marian's age, whom she spoke of humorously as her 'own au pair'. I argue that this description of her partner explicitly departs from heteronormative ideals and queers her relationship by emphasising both the age difference and the reversed gender roles. In addition, the partner provided Marian with the possibility of long-term formal citizenship rights through marriage. Imelda was torn between her desire for a life working abroad and the possibility of marrying her boyfriend in her home country. She brought up stories of au pairs who had married their host dads, and I argue in the article that Imelda's host dad became imaginable as a spouse through her already quasi-familial relationship with him and their physical proximity in the household. When citizenship and future ambitions are at stake, intimate relations that are already vague can slide, as seen in Imelda's case. Sonya, on the other hand, was a Muslim who wanted to remain in Norway, but was highly cautious regarding her self-presentation, as she was well aware of the racism in Norway that particularly affects Muslims. Sonya's narrative suggests that those who perceive themselves as formally and culturally at the borders of the nation and whose formal citizenship status depends on relationships with others, must carefully manage their informal citizenship. The last story I discuss in the article is Paulina's. Paulina had formal citizenship rights, as she had travelled from a country in the EU, yet she was disappointed by her host family, who failed to provide her with informal citizenship. Paulina gained a boyfriend in Norway and found other work through his help. I argue that it seems likely that

this intimate relation might have served as a shortcut for her to become acquainted with what Harald Bauder calls ‘the commitment to imagined national behavioural norms, attitudes, and cultural conventions [that] distinguishes citizens from those migrants who are unable to express belonging’ (Bauder, 2008, p. 325). In Paulina’s case, there seems to have been a transition from informal citizenship *without* agency, based on her relationship with the host family, to what seems to have been a much more age-appropriate informal citizenship *with* agency.

Following the stories of the four informants, I ask whether attaining citizenship through intimacy is a promising strategy. The au pair scheme provides a confusing space for manoeuvring formal and informal citizenship, rights, duties and interpersonal roles. While au pairs might not fit the images of ‘big sister’ or ‘domestic worker’, their relations with boyfriends might provide them with a more age-appropriate sense of agency that allows for a performance of citizenship through affective investment, and possibly formal citizenship through marriage. Through the concepts of formal, informal and intimate citizenship, it is possible to address the way in which intimate relations can provide a space for citizenship to be performed, as well as gained. The combination of concepts also allows us to address ‘aliens’ who lack formal citizenship rights but still have a sense of informal citizenship, and those with formal citizenship rights (such as EU nationals) who nevertheless lack informal citizenship – for example a social network to assist them in job or flat hunting.

What the stories discussed here also highlight is that there seems to be a culturally circulated narrative of a gradual transition from ‘daughter’ to ‘wife’ through a cultural kinning process that has its natural conclusion in family reunification. The role of ‘daughter’ can potentially provide au pairs with informal citizenship through a network, language and cultural knowledge, yet formal citizenship can, in reality, only be achieved permanently through marriage. At the same time, it seems as if the label of ‘daughter’ or ‘big sister’ is

supposed to recruit the incest taboo in order to prevent a sexual relation between the au pair and the host dad. This leads to a silencing of exactly how desirable this coupling can seem to both au pairs and host dads, which again makes the sexual exploitation of au pairs more difficult to address.

I conclude by arguing that au pairing as a migration route is an inherently individualistic project wherein each au pair must carve out a road for herself. Yet there is a sense of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011) to this, because formal citizenship is always, in the end, governed from above. Au pairs walk a tightrope between precarity and agency, due to a combination of their lack of formal rights and the formal and informal acknowledgment of the work they do and the roles they play.

### **2.3. Framing the au pair. Problems of sex, work and motherhood in Norwegian au pair documentaries<sup>3</sup>**

In the final article (Stubberud, 2015), I discuss two Norwegian television documentaries about au pairs. While, in reality, au pairs come from a wide range of countries and show tremendously varied motivations and experiences (as supported by the two articles discussed above), the image that is most often presented of au pairs in the Norwegian media is that of the poor Filipina – often with dependent children who have been left behind in the home country – who is motivated by work and not by cultural exchange, and who is sexually abused, trafficked or overworked by the host family. This depiction is also drawn on in the two documentaries, *Mammaranet* ('The Mummy Robbery') (Rommetveit, 2006) and *Herskap og tenarar* ('Masters and Servants') (Sunde & Isungset, 2013). The documentaries represent various problems connected to au pairing, and in this article I ask: How is au pairing represented in the documentaries? What do the problems connected to au pairing appear to be? How does the au pair feature

---

<sup>3</sup> The article is published in *NORA Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 2015, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 125-39.

in these representations? And what solutions to the 'problems' of au pairing are implicitly suggested?

*Mammaranet* was shown on Norwegian television in 2006, and follows an au pair, Emmalyn, who migrated to Norway in order to provide financially for her daughter in the Philippines. Emmalyn talks about abusive work conditions in her former host family, and the film follows her as she travels back to the Philippines with her Norwegian husband to visit her daughter. The title of the film suggests that Norwegian families who hire au pairs 'rob' children in the Philippines of their mothers. The other documentary, *Herskap og tenarar*, was televised in 2013 and, as the title of the film suggests, perceives au pairing as a form of domestic work with historical links. The film dwells on breaches of the au pair contract in terms of working tasks and working hours, and also explores the problem of sexual abuse, as revealed through the stories of a number of anonymous au pairs. It follows the au pair Christy, who was allegedly trafficked by her former host family, whom she had managed to flee from. Christy also had a child in the Philippines whom her partner and extended family were taking care of, while Christy provided remittances. The Filipino community in Oslo features heavily in the film, in scenes from a Christmas party and a Miss Au Pair beauty pageant.

In the analysis of the films, I argue that they draw on a logic that is similar to that found in literature on global care chains (GCC). Global care chains (Hochschild, 2000) conceptualise the globalisation of care as creating a care deficit in the global south, as carers migrate to the global north. Yet this conceptualisation has been critiqued for targeting female migrants and traditional women's work, which 'reinforces dominant sociocultural construction of carework as women's work' (Yeates, 2012, p. 145) through, for example, privileging the stories of migrant mothers (Manalansan, 2006). I furthermore draw on Gargi Bhattacharyya's notion of 'the exotic' as the continued sexualisation of the abuse of power (2002). Bhattacharyya argues that the process of exoticisation has a

therapeutic function for the holder of the colonial gaze, as it makes the abuse of power not only bearable, but also desirable.

In the article, I engage in a close and critical reading of the films and argue that their framing of pairing is problematic in several ways. First, Emmalyn and Christy are framed implicitly through a GCC perspective. Their motherhood is foregrounded and their absence is represented as problematic for their children – despite the fact that other carers (who remain largely unacknowledged) are present with the children. The films frame the au pairs' absent motherhood as problematic, and I argue that the effect of this is that the notion of 'good care' comes to refer only to a mother's care; thus, a mother who is not present cannot be a good carer, regardless of her provision of financial and other types of long-distance care. Furthermore, in this framework, fathers and other carers are not acknowledged as competent carers.

The second problem regarding the films' framing of au pairing, that is particularly emphasised in *Herskap og tenarar*, is a gliding transition from host families' breach of working contracts to the trafficking and sexual abuse of au pairs. The au pairs are depicted as vulnerable in specific ways; anonymous au pairs' narratives about sexual abuse are cross-cut with scenes from an au pair beauty pageant, and I argue that this cross-cutting has (presumably) unintended effects. While the beauty pageant could have been portrayed as a community-building event for Filipina au pairs, I argue that the cross-cutting suggests a connection between the pageant and sexual abuse. The au pairs in the film thus seem to be constructing themselves as highly feminised, sexually available young women – or 'girls', as they are spoken of in the film. I claim that the film's portrayal of au pairs draws on Orientalist discourses of Asian woman as hypersexual, yet innocent and titillating, submissive and attuned to traditional gender roles.

The films' representations of problems contribute to a certain cultural circulation of 'truths' that allow for discourses favouring some policies over others. Firstly,

the fact that au pairs are represented in the films only as Filipinas is problematic in and of itself, as the films fail to acknowledge the broad range of au pairs actually present in Norway. The framing of au pairs as mothers and exploitable domestic workers furthermore locates the 'problem of au pairing' with (Filipina) au pairs. The films reduce the motivations of au pairs who are also mothers to purely financial ones, and ignore a range of other reasons for which au pairs – including those who are also mothers – participate in the scheme; this goes against the apparent intention of the au pair scheme as cultural exchange. It is ironic that documentaries produced for a Norwegian, supposedly gender equality-orientated audience, portray female breadwinners as insufficient mothers and fail to recognise fathers as legitimate carers. Furthermore, the depiction of au pairs as simultaneously victims and highly sexualised young women is, in itself, a problematic framing of au pairing, because the culprits – abusive host families – are never shown on screen. Thus, audiences are encouraged to think about the characters they actually see and are led to the implied conclusion that the problems are also located with these characters.

While scholars in the field generally suggest that au pairing should be acknowledged as work, with the possibility of a separate cultural exchange programme, this is often met with counter-arguments of social dumping and a global 'underclass' of servants. In this article, I claim that when the films naturalise au pairs as poor, Filipina women who are sexually exploitable, these fears are fuelled. I conclude by arguing that the films carve out a space in which it could be argued that the au pair scheme should be closed to women from the global south. By outlawing the Filipina woman from the au pair scheme, the unequal power hierarchy she seems to embody as a symbolic figure in the films could be thought to disappear, while the au pair scheme would inevitably continue as usual, but with less visible au pairs.

This article, as well as the two summarised above, build on a body of literature on au pairs that I also hope to contribute to. In what follows, I turn to this literature

in an attempt to map out what au pairing is and has been at a few places and points in time, and outline the existing knowledge that both provides some answers and generates more questions regarding what au pairing is, who the au pair is imagined to be and how she becomes imaginable as such. It thus provides the backdrop and basis for the themes of the three articles of this thesis, as affective labour, negotiations in the domestic sphere, formal and informal citizenship, and intimate relations, agency and representations are all key issues in existing research on au pairs.

### **3. Au pairing and live-in migrant domestic work**

In this part, I flesh out au pairing – both in Norway and more globally – by presenting the empirical field in dialogue with the research literature on au pairing and live-in migrant domestic work. ‘Au pairing’ might refer to a visa category, a specific living arrangement, a career path, a short-term domestic service, language learning and cultural exchange, an employer/employee relation, a migration route, a specific rate of pay and so on. Yet the visa category and the legislation behind it still provide the backdrop and the context of au pairing in Norway, in terms of practice, media portrayals and critiques of the au pair scheme and the motivation for young people to become au pairs. However, what au pairing is or means is nevertheless a question of context and practice.

The goal of the following part is to map out some of the possibilities created in the various contexts, and to flesh out the background for the particular research questions of this study. Au pairing is produced in a particular way in the Norwegian public sphere, and au pair legislation and the cultural meanings of au pairing in Norway are the focus of the first sub-section. Here, I examine all of the elements of the legislation and indicate the way in which they shape au pairing. Throughout this section on the legal conditions for au pairing in Norway, I highlight the relevance of key points of interest in this thesis. While the first section focuses specifically on au pairing in Norway, a number of other Western countries are discussed throughout this part. Drawing on research in the field, I look at the genealogy of au pairing and the way in which au pairing is part of a much longer history of domestic servitude. I then discuss host families in the Norwegian welfare state and their reasons for employing au pairs. While this is not a topic I follow throughout the thesis because my material gave limited insight into it, it is important background to the situation of au pairs in Norway, and can also be seen in relation to the wider cultural production of au pairing.

Host families' thoughts about au pairing are also important to the way in which au pairing is produced as simultaneously work and non-work.

Because au pairing can be practiced in such a wide range of ways, the way in which au pairs understand, use and act within the position are other aspects that I discuss in the following. Furthermore, au pairing can serve as a vehicle for temporary and permanent migration, and I discuss this with reference to the various migratory experiences au pairs may have. The work of au pairs is an important aspect of this thesis, yet when discussing the work, it is hard not to take into account the way in which the practice of au pairing, as work, relates to the discursive production of au pairing as 'cultural exchange'. The fact that au pairs carry out live-in domestic work as 'part of the family' shapes negotiations over this work.

Finally, I discuss class, race, ethnicity and gender in au pairing, a topic which I follow up in part four, 'Intersectionality at work'. In this section, however, I look closely at the ways in which au pairing enters into broader mechanisms of marginalisation, inclusion and exclusion, based on class, race, ethnicity and gender. I look at how au pairs surface in media representations and scholarly literature, for instance, as Filipinas, additional wives, slaves, youth on cultural exchange and as workers.

Throughout the part that follows below I connect my research questions to the field. How au pairs understand au pairing, how the figure of the au pair is produced, how au pairing is constituted as work and non-work, how au pairs describe their forms of agency and, finally, how the processes of marginalisation, inclusion and exclusion impact au pairing are all discussed with reference to the wider field of au pairing, both in Norway and more globally.

### **3.1. Au pairing in Norway: Legal framework and cultural meanings**

Even if the rules and regulations are not always followed, au pair legislation nevertheless plays a part in the shaping, conceptualisation, imagining and practice of au pairing in Norway. In the following, I flesh out the legal framework in order to introduce the topic of au pairing and the problems embedded in it – some of which directly influence the research questions I ask in this thesis.

According to the regulations of the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI), the au pair's purpose for participating in the scheme should be cultural exchange. An au pair visa lasts for a maximum of two years and is tied to a specific host family. In order to apply for the visa, the au pair must be between the ages of 18 and 30 and cannot have any children. It must be likely that the au pair will return to her home country upon completion of her stay, and the circumstances in her home country must indicate that it is possible for her to return (UDI, 2014a). The host family must consist of at least two persons, and need not necessarily include children. The family must also 'have good knowledge of Norwegian society and speak Norwegian to the au pair' (ibid.). If a member of the host family is from the same country as the au pair, a visa will normally not be granted. Furthermore, the au pair and host family must not be related. According to Norwegian People's Aid, who run the Au Pair Centre in Oslo, around 20 per cent of au pairs find their host family through one of the two au pair agencies in Norway, while the remaining 80 per cent find their families through the Internet or through friends and family (Aaslund, 2013).

The legislation suggests that a certain type of person can become an au pair: someone who is young, and who comes from a country that is stable enough to return to. These rules set au pairing apart from migration and communicate that au pairing should not, under any circumstance, be understood as a migration route. The regulations prohibiting host families from hiring au pairs from their own home countries or au pairs whom they are related to, prevent the au pair

scheme from facilitating family migration. These regulations reflect the strict migration scheme in Norway, and a pervasive political concern over limiting migration from outside Europe. Nevertheless, my study suggests that au pairing does, in fact, facilitate migration to Norway. This tension between the regulations and the practice of the scheme motivated me to further investigate how au pairing related to migration in my informants' experiences.

The host family should treat the au pair as a member of the family – as suggested by the UDI's information websites about au pairs sharing meals and joining host families on outings – and the au pair should have her own room in the host family's house. Tasks in the family could include 'light tasks such as housework, child care and caring for pets' (UDI, 2014a). An au pair can normally work for a maximum of five hours per day and 30 hours per week, and she cannot work extra either for pay or on a voluntary basis. In comparison, a normal working week in Norway is 37.5 hours. The monthly 'pocket money/pay' for au pairs is currently 5,400 NOK before tax, in addition to holiday pay, and board and lodging, worth 114 NOK per day, are also taxed as pay. Furthermore, au pairs should be given the opportunity to participate in language courses worth up to 8,100 NOK, paid for by the host family.<sup>4</sup> The host family must also pay for the au pair's return ticket, providing she goes back to her home country. If the au pair wants to change host families, she must apply anew and pay the application fee of 2,500 NOK, which is also the initial application cost. Host families who violate the conditions of au pairing – for example by overworking the au pair – may be quarantined for one, two, five or ten years, depending on the violation (UDI, 2014c). However, the difficulty faced by au pairs in reporting violations (due to a lack of knowledge of their own rights), as well as their difficulty proving

---

<sup>4</sup> The current price for a 48-hour beginner's course in Norwegian at Folkeuniversitetet in Trondheim is 4,750 NOK (Folkeuniversitetet, 2014).

violations and their fear of having to leave the country, suggest that this legislation does not offer particularly effective protection for au pairs.<sup>5</sup>

The economic conditions au pairs work under and the restrictions on their tasks are pivotal issues in au pairs' lives, and a site of concern, conflict and worry for all involved actors. The regulations facilitate a system of live-in domestic work wherein the au pair's work is not acknowledged as such, as noted above. The legitimacy of this arrangement is produced by the regulations, but it is also legitimised through the social interaction between the au pair and the host family. The scheme suggests that the practice of claiming (falsely) that the au pair is 'part of the family' should be used to do this. However, these discussions about the relationship between au pairs and host families are dominated by work-related issues, and the tension between work and non-work in the au pair scheme emerges as an organising principle of au pairing, as I investigate in this thesis.

A total of 1,476 au pair visas were issued in 2013, and 96 per cent of the visa holders were women.<sup>6</sup> Although there are male au pairs in Norway, au pairing is clearly a gendered migration scheme and I stick to the female pronoun in this thesis for this reason. Given that an au pair visa lasts for two years, the total number of au pairs in Norway may be around 3,000. In addition to this, au pairs coming to Norway from the Nordic countries do not have to register as such. While au pairs from the European Union (EU) and Schengen Area countries must register upon arrival, their reason for registering is not tracked and thus it is impossible to know how many au pairs there are in Norway – a problem also noted by Anna Gavanas in Sweden (2006, p. 316).<sup>7</sup> The Au Pair Centre in Oslo registers all inquiries from au pairs, and also registers the nationality of au pairs who contact them or whom a query concerns. Between January and May 2014, the

---

<sup>5</sup> Personal communication with Marit Vik at the Au Pair Centre in Oslo, 11.06.2014.

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication with Minja Tea Dzamarija at Statistics Norway, 15.12.2014.

<sup>7</sup> In searching for indications of the total number of au pairs, I contacted police stations as well as au pair agencies. Yet while the former did not have any information, the latter did not respond, despite my repeated attempts at contact.

centre received 158 inquiries. While 55 per cent of these came from or concerned au pairs from the Philippines, 10 per cent referred to au pairs from Europe, 12 per cent referred to those from countries outside Europe other than the Philippines, and 20 per cent referred to those of unknown origin (Au Pair Center, 2014). While these figures are nothing to go by in terms of the total number of au pairs, they nevertheless show that there is likely to be a significant number of people living and working as au pairs who are not accounted for on formal registers.

It is evident that au pairing provides a highly gendered way of travelling abroad for work, and that gender informs the very conditions of this arrangement. The gendered nature of the work, the live-in arrangement and the lack of acknowledgement of the work involved can only seem sensible if the cultural legitimacy of diminishing women's work in the private sphere is utilised. However, it is evident that gender and race intersect in powerful ways to naturalise au pairing in its present form. Furthermore, gender in au pairing intersects with other aspects, such as class, race and ethnicity. White Norwegians who hire migrant domestic workers do so in a transnational economy, wherein white and middle- or upper-class privilege allows them to outsource domestic work to other women, who are most frequently imagined to be Filipinas (Stubberud, 2015).

A substantial aspect of this thesis concerns the cultural meanings of au pairing in Norway. The ways in which au pairs are constructed by the media give a good picture of the perception of au pairs in the public sphere. In recent years, au pairing in Norway has been subject to a great deal of public scrutiny and media attention. A search on the media analysis database Retriever revealed that, in 1994, the Norwegian print media published 41 articles on au pairs; in 2013, this number was 547. Even if a number of these news items were mass-printed press releases from court trials between au pairs and host families that were relatively well covered by the press, it is still significant that such trials were deemed newsworthy to such an extent. The general tone of recent media coverage is

negative when the focusing on the au pair, and a great deal of attention is paid to trafficking, sexual abuse and dilemmas concerning the discrepancy between legislation and practice. The national newspaper *Dagbladet*, for example, covered a court case in which a Norwegian couple was judged not guilty of having forced their au pairs to work overtime in their shop. The court argued that the au pairs knew the rules and were at liberty to change families (Andersen, 2013).

Interestingly, however, one of the most recent news articles at the time of writing concerns Norwegian au pairs abroad and the reasons why they are so few in number. This article was published in *Dagens Næringsliv*, the national business tabloid (Lohne, 2014). The stereotyped readership of this newspaper – the financial elite – are also those most likely to employ au pairs. A suspicious reading would suggest that this news story was published in an attempt to convince the readership that au pairing is, in fact, a form of cultural exchange, because this is the key motivation of Norwegian au pairs abroad. The general criticism of the au pair scheme in the Norwegian public sphere revolves less around whether au pairs work and more around whether they *are* workers (see, e.g., Lønseth, 2012; Mæland, 2012; Sollund, 2012a) and the extent to which they are abused (Sunde & Isungset, 2013). By printing a story on Norwegian au pairs abroad who explicitly stated that they took a gap year because they wanted to learn another language and because they loved to take care of children, the media may have attempted to enhance the cultural exchange aspect by underlining that au pairs are motivated by cultural exchange, not work; thus, this must be what the au pair scheme, in fact, is.

The heated discussions about au pairing in the Norwegian public sphere indicate that the scheme raises social issues, beyond itself. The au pair scheme implicitly invokes a number of issues concerning globalisation, increased transnational movement and global inequality, and Norwegian public culture can be seen to be in ongoing discussions about how these issues should be handled. It should be noted that denial in order to secure the idea of an insular self-contained nation is

a politically significant approach to these issues, locally. Concretely, discussion about whether au pairs are workers inevitably raises the question of whether Norway should allow unskilled work migration from outside the European Economic Area (EEA). This question, in turn, links the issue to the country's widespread anti-immigration sentiment. This national political context fuels debates about au pairing and provides a subtext for understanding both the legal framework of the scheme and the public understanding of it in Norway. For those who want to keep the scheme as it is, avoiding the conceptualisation of au pairing as live-in domestic work seems pivotal. However, the history of the scheme suggests otherwise.

### **3.2. The genealogy of au pairing**

Historically, au pairing has shared a lot in common with other forms of domestic work. Current au pair legislation in Norway, along with numerous other countries, is based on the 1969 Strasbourg Agreement. This agreement describes au pairing as something between cultural exchange and work, and defines it as 'the temporary reception by families, in exchange for certain services, of young foreigners who come to improve their linguistic and possibly professional knowledge as well as their general culture by acquiring a better knowledge of the country where they are received' (Council of Europe, 1969). In this section, I demonstrate the way in which au pairing has historically been produced as simultaneously work and non-work. Through this history, it becomes evident that au pairing was not transformed in Norway when the country moved from being a sending to a receiving country; rather, the national perspective on au pairing changed in this process from seeing the work through the eyes of the white Western domestic worker to seeing it through the eyes of the white western employer.

Eleni Liarou argues that, in the United Kingdom, employment of au pairs has always been a way to 'relieve the British middle-classes of the "servant problem"'

(Liarou, 2015, p. 21). Liarou states that the history of au pairing is fundamentally socio-economic and springs out of a desire for servants during the 'servant crisis' in the UK in the interwar period. During this time, 'the figure of the "foreign au pair visitor" emerged [in the 1930s in the UK] in this context as a way of softening the blow of public criticism against the recruitment of foreign maids' (ibid., p. 23). Liarou thus firmly locates the history of au pairing in the context of servitude. This is interesting in a Norwegian context, in which the Strasbourg Agreement is used to explain the emphasis on cultural exchange, rather than work, in au pair legislation (Gullikstad & Annfelt, forthcoming). It is also interesting that the au pair visa changed its status from a working visa to a student visa in 2003. While this change had symbolic, rather than practical, meaning, it nevertheless emphasised the 'non-work' element of au pairing (ibid.).

Au pairs and domestic servants have historically performed much the same work. This further emphasises the difficulty of drawing a line between au pairing and other forms of paid domestic work. Helle Stenum (2010c) points towards some of these similarities in her comparison of maids in 20th century Denmark and au pairs today. She notes that similarities include the difficulty of distinguishing working hours from spare time, the sometimes undesirable living conditions in the less attractive rooms in the house, loneliness and isolation, and an overwhelming workload. There is one difference, however: while the maids of the 20th century were, in a sense, travelling upward in the class hierarchy, contemporary maids, which Stenum exemplifies as Filipina au pairs, instead travel downward in the class hierarchy, as they often have higher education degrees from their home country, yet perform 'unskilled' labour in Denmark (Stenum, 2010c, p. 78).

The au pair scheme produces au pairing as non-work through the frame of cultural exchange. Stenum describes the frequent situation of highly skilled au pairs carrying out work that is unacknowledged as such, which suggests a process of marginalisation. Something about these women makes it seem acceptable for

their labour to be utilised without acknowledgement. Questions of what au pairing is and how it is produced as non-work are key issues in this thesis. By connecting these questions with historical views of domestic workers, I hope to clarify that au pairing is a continuation of a historical practice reliant on processes of marginalisation in relation to class, race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality.

Taking into account the genealogy of au pairing sheds light on the way in which au pairing is, in fact, labour during the time au pairs work. The Norwegian television documentary *Kvinne 2013: De gode hjelperne* ('Woman 2013: The Good Helpers') (Kårstad, 2013) compares domestic labour and servitude through history in Norway by interviewing a Filipina au pair and her host family as well as a few elderly Norwegian women, who had previously worked as maids or home helps (*husmorvikar*, directly translated as 'housewife substitute') from the 1940s onwards. The documentary firmly establishes female servitude as a historical continuant, pointing to the fact that, in the mid-1960s, around 50,000 families in Norway received help from publicly employed home helps. The film also points to the similarities between the au pairs and the former maids and home helps in terms of tasks, relationships with employers, problems and motivations for becoming domestic workers that relate to migration (in the case of the home helps, migration related to a move from the countryside to the cities), adventure and money. It is also interesting to note that, during the timespan covered by the film, domestic help transitioned from a public responsibility to a private opportunity available to those who could afford it. However, the implicit analogy between home helps and au pairs is problematic. Home helps were publicly employed professionals with a wage, rights and social benefits. Their employing families typically needed help because of the mother's prolonged absence during childbirth, illness, death or other life crises. Today, this is generally not the ground for which host families hire an au pair, and the working conditions are not comparable.

The history of domestic service also indicates that the ambiguous definitions of tasks and responsibilities serve many of the same functions then as now – namely providing affordable, educated ‘servants’. In contemporary Norway, au pairs’ work is branded in such a way that it is (supposedly) appealing to both au pairs and host families. For example, au pair work is often described as a life-cycle service or ‘cultural exchange’, suggesting a relationship between equals. Yet this has some consequences in terms of depriving rights for au pairs. This tension between domestic work and cultural exchange remains a key issue, particularly for understanding the cultural politics of au pairing in the Norwegian context.

### **3.3. Host families in the ‘equality-orientated’ welfare state**

In the context of au pairing, Norway has changed from a sending country to a receiving country. One of the au pair agencies in Norway, Atlantis, works with both incoming and outgoing au pairs. Over the past two decades, the number of au pairs they have sent from the country has been steadily declining: 932 Norwegian au pairs travelled abroad in 1994, while only 18 travelled in 2013 (Lohne, 2014). In contrast, the number of au pairs coming to Norway has increased over the same period, with 158 au pair visas issued in 1994 and 1,476 issued in 2013.<sup>8</sup> Thus, while the story of the change from cultural exchange to work is frequently told, it is worth asking whether the matter is more one of changed perspective seen from a Norwegian point of view. Norwegians have gone from being the au pair to being the host family; from considering au pairing simply as a way of travelling to considering hiring au pairs; and from travelling to other people’s homes to live and work to opening up one’s home and thus also considering the practical implications, as well as the symbolic meanings, of home. The perceived change of the au pair scheme has led to a great deal of public criticism and debate over what au pairing is and should be. In this section,

---

<sup>8</sup> Personal communication with Minja Tea Džamarija at Statistics Norway, 15.12.2014.

I look at au pairing from the perspective of the host families in the equality-orientated Norwegian welfare state.

Au pairing is a site of trouble in the welfare state. There seems to be little doubt that host families in Norway employ au pairs because they experience a need or a desire for a domestic worker (Bikova, 2008, 2010; Due, 2011; Kristensen, 2015; Sollund, 2010a, 2010b; Øien, 2009). Thus, there is also no doubt that domestic work and carework are commodified through au pairing (Gavanas, 2006), and it is an empirical reality that there is a market for these services. Because au pair legislation suggests that au pairing is 'cultural exchange', it is possible for host parents and au pairs, alike, to distance themselves from the market they are part of. In Norway – and to various extents also the other Nordic countries – hiring domestic help is somewhat frowned upon (Gavanas, 2006; Kristensen, 2015; Sollund, 2010b). Hiring full-time or live-in domestic workers (not including hourly-based home cleaners) has not been common practice in Norway since around the 1950s (Alsos & Eldrin, 2010). Servitude does not fit the Norwegian ideal of equality and sameness (Gavanas, 2006; Gullestad, 2002; Sollund, 2010a), thus it is hard to discuss paid domestic work in straightforward terms, as it draws attention to class and other forms of inequalities (Gavanas, 2006; Kristensen, 2015; Sollund, 2010b). This might contribute to the maintenance of the notion of au pairing as 'cultural exchange', as it simply better fits the idea of equality.

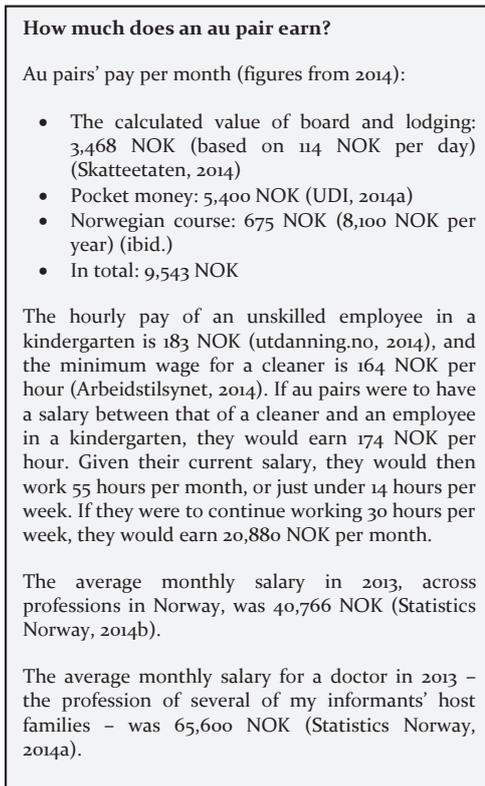
Au pairs are supposed to carry out light housework and childcare. Yet in a country in which heavily subsidised kindergartens are universally available for all children over the age of one, what childcare is there left to do? When heterosexual couples in Norway have children, gender inequality increases. The wage gap increases (Østbakken, 2014) and the woman takes more responsibility in the household and does more of the domestic work that, prior to children, was more evenly distributed. The man, on the other hand, works more outside the home (Kjeldstad & Lappegård, 2008; Statistics Norway, 2012). Statistically, it has been shown that men earn more after having children (Østbakken, 2014).

Furthermore, the distribution of domestic work and carework shows that, while men do carry out childcare, they are reluctant to clean (Fjell, 2010, pp. 107–8). This suggests a hierarchy of tasks wherein childcare ranks higher than cleaning and other domestic chores. In this context, employment of a domestic worker seems to be a solution. The proportion of families with small children who employ a cleaner rose from 6 per cent in 2000 to 13 per cent in 2009 (Statistics Norway, 2009). Hiring a domestic worker might be a strategy for equality minded couples to avoid having to explain why the woman does most of the housework and the male partner does not contribute (Fjell, 2010, p. 110; see also Haavind, 1984). One ‘solution’, then, is for families to employ au pairs, who are most often managed by women (see, e.g., Døving & Klepp, 2010; Mellini, Yodanis, & Godenzi, 2007; Stenum, 2010b, p. 53).

Despite the widely circulated image of au pairs as childcarers, domestic work seems to be the primary reason for which host families employ au pairs in Norway (Bikova, 2008; Due, 2011; Sollund, 2010b). As several of Guro K. Kristensen’s informants (who all employed au pairs) stated, they did not employ au pairs to outsource time with their children, but rather to have more time with their children. This means that au pairs performed the tidying, cleaning, cooking and laundry for the household, rather than the childcare (Kristensen, 2015). Au pairs are likely to be given responsibility for household tasks that are lowest on the hierarchy, and which they are in a weak position to negotiate over. The same goes for working hours. Some host families interviewed by Ragnhild Sollund (2010b) stated that their au pairs worked for five to six hours a day, while others ‘freely admitted that their au pairs worked eight to ten hours daily ... “No one follows those rules. No one needs an au pair [only] five, six hours a day!”’ (Sollund, 2010b, p. 147). Thus, while increased flexibility and availability seems to be motivational factors for host parents to employ au pairs (Bikova, 2008), these factors also lead to decreased flexibility for au pairs, who must work odd hours (Øien, 2009).

Host families see themselves in a variety of ways in relation to the au pairs: as employers, 'parents' or friends (Kristensen, 2015; Sollund, 2010b). They list a range of reasons for employing au pairs, and also use a range of strategies to explain and justify their choice. Stories of 'micro-aid' and 'helping' au pairs achieve better lives are common (Gavanas, 2006, p. 322; Sollund, 2010a, 2010b). Within this logic, there is an implicit or explicit justification of the 'pocket money' au pairs are paid, as opposed to a proper salary, with host parents arguing that the money would, in fact, be considered a lot in the au pair's home country (Gavanas, 2006; Sollund, 2010b). Framing the relationship in terms of micro-aid can also allow host parents to professionalise the relationship by acknowledging au pairs as workers who have migrated out of their own interest. At the same time, host families can focus on more noble aspects of au pairing than their own outsourcing of domestic work – namely helping supposedly disadvantaged women. Yet au pairs, themselves, may not appreciate this understanding of the situation; they are well aware that their ethnicity or nationality 'justifies' their lack of salary in the host family's view, and at the same time excludes them from the regular labour market, due to migration policies (Gavanas, 2006). The micro-aid framework that some families use suggests awareness of the fact that the availability of au pairs in Norway is a result of global inequality. Through the micro-aid discourse, host families position themselves as benevolent helpers, rather than employers who substantially underpay their workers. In doing so, they enter a position that has already been carved out, so to speak, for white Western subjects through the colonial endeavour (Lundström, 2014).

Figure 1 shows the current hourly and monthly pay of an au pair compared to the average monthly salary in Norway, overall, as well as the average monthly salary of a doctor in Norway. I include this data to illustrate the general gap between au



pairs and their host families in terms of earnings. The figure points to the way in which economic inequality manifests itself in the employment relation between the au pair and host family. It illustrates that host families' ideas of micro-aid envision the au pair as completely detached from their own social world, and see her poverty on a completely different scale from that which they use to measure their own wealth. She is in their household, but, despite the spatial proximity, she is not part of their metaphoric kinship. Nevertheless, au pairing can be a migration route, as I discuss in the following part.

Figure 1

### 3.4. Au pairing as a migration route

Au pairing is not intended as a migration route beyond the maximum of two years that the Strasbourg Agreement allows; nonetheless, in the scholarly literature on au pairing, it is in various ways discussed as such. In Norway, there are no migration routes available for so-called unskilled workers from outside the European Union. This means that, for many of the women who come to Norway as au pairs, au pairing is the only way for them to migrate temporarily to Norway. Once in the country, they may hope to use their au pair period to find ways to

stay long-term. The Philippines is – and has been – an important source of au pairs for the past ten years. This means that, despite Norway’s ban on unskilled work migration, the au pair scheme has the potential to deliver low-paid domestic workers without substantial changes to the law. In discussing au pairing as a form of migration, I do not mean to suggest that it is always practiced or intended as a long-term migration plan for au pairs. Rather, I acknowledge that, while the women work abroad as au pairs, they are, in fact, migrants; this is true regardless of whether their stay is temporary or becomes permanent, and regardless of their initial ambitions when becoming au pairs. What follows are different accounts of what au pair migration has meant in different contexts, and I discuss these accounts partly to identify forms of agency in au pairing, as the ability to determine where and how one wants to live are important aspects of agency.

Bridget Anderson notes that the term ‘migrant worker’ is highly gendered, racialised and classed; it is reserved for someone carrying out, for example, live-in domestic work, while a visiting university professor, in contrast, would not be labelled as such (2009, p. 410). Referring to the case of an au pair and another case of a domestic worker, she points out that ‘they were not paid domestic workers who decided to emigrate; they were women who decided to work in private households as the easiest way of obtaining legal work abroad’ (Anderson, 2009, p. 413). At the same time, host families may employ certain visa holders and expect specific relationships based on the broader preconceptions connected to these visas (Anderson, 2009, p. 414). Au pairing is a type of job that ‘closely resemble[s] the unpaid labour done in the home by household members’ (Cox, 2012, p. 33), but with young migrant women, sometimes with little or no knowledge of the host country and little or no social network. This, combined with the idea of ‘cultural exchange’, which serves as a smokescreen for the work of au pairs, makes au pairing an interesting migration route to pursue, also because au pairs can use the smokescreen of ‘cultural exchange’ to avoid the

stigmatising label of ‘migrant worker’, with all its gendered, racialised and classed connotations, and instead label themselves as students.

This is particularly clear in instances in which a woman’s motivation to become an au pair is the appeal of a foreign culture and the wish to leave home. However, it is not necessarily the au pair scheme, in itself, that is the attraction, but the apparently easy solution it provides (Geserick, 2012). Au pairing can also serve as an ‘avenue of personal development’, which gains au pairs recognition as ‘mature women’ (Dalgas, 2014, p. 2). This might mean higher social status in the local community of the home country, as well as an ability for au pairs to reposition themselves within their families (ibid.). Au pairing can furthermore provide a way for young people to increase their financial capacities. This may make it possible for them to exercise care for parents and other family members in new ways – for example by giving expensive gifts – which may also serve as a marker of independence from the family (Rohde, 2012). Furthermore, au pairs’ investment in the local language and culture, along with the emotional investment that seems part and parcel of living in a host family as an au pair, might create a feeling that they deserve to stay in the host country, as Olga Tkach’s informants argued (Tkach, 2014, p. 145).

While all the above accounts of au pairing are rather positive and revolve around au pairing as a migration route, as a learning opportunity and as an affordable way to travel abroad, these accounts exist alongside a different set of accounts of au pairing. Reasons to migrate may be much more contradictory than simply the desire to study or the desire to earn money. Zuzana Búriková notes that ‘the reason of learning a language and economic possibilities frequently served to hide far more complex (and perhaps less acceptable) reasons to migrate’ in her informants accounts (Búriková, 2014, p. 149). These reasons included getting away from difficult relationships with family or partners, or fulfilling an ideal of ‘neoliberal personhood’ that one could embody through the rite of passage of the migration process (ibid.). Au pairing may also be ‘a form of aspirational

migration, which draws on imaginary social mobility and cultural capital' (Pérez, 2015, p. 208). This is particularly visible in instances in which women acquire debt in order to pay for mandatory health checks, visas or travel expenses to enable them to become au pairs (Platzer, 2002), or pay acquaintances significant sums for connecting them with prospective host families (Øien, 2009, p. 46). This kind of debt can take a very long time to pay off – especially on an au pair salary. There is furthermore no guarantee that the au pair will be able to stay on or find better paid work upon the end of her au pair visa.

The experience of the individual au pair may be shaped by all of the aspects of au pair migration discussed above: the preparation for and possibilities of acquiring debt as part of migration; au pairing as a life-cycle service and a road to something else; migration as a way of increasing one's status in the home country; and au pairing as a random form of migration because it is the most accessible or only available route. This is important, because it shows how random and indeed empty the concept of au pairing can be. Au pairing, it seems, is always about something else. Yet au pairing, as I learnt from my informants, is also fundamentally shaped by the regulations of the au pair scheme, the status of (paid/unpaid) domestic work in the receiving country and migration regimes, and each of these aspects requires careful attention. It is not a given that the migration regime is the most important aspect for every au pair, nor is it a given that the status of domestic work fundamentally shapes each au pair's experience. I would, however, claim that all of the abovementioned factors matter in au pairs' lives, but in different ways, depending on context.

One must pay close attention to the way in which migration regimes matter. When Mirza A. Pérez (2015) argues that au pairing is 'aspirational migration', her claim is based on the potentially substantial structural obstacles that cannot and should not be ignored. Attention to structural challenges should thus be combined with attention to the individual motivations for, and effects of, au pairing in order to produce geographically situated knowledge of au pair

migration. Attention to individual stories also allows one to stay attuned to the forms of agency that surface in stories of migration, even if these stories are shaped by migration regimes and larger structures of inclusion and exclusion. These structures also feed into the way in which au pairs negotiate their tasks in the host family as ‘part of the family’, as well as how the notion of ‘cultural exchange’ shapes this aspect of au pairing, which is what I discuss in the next section.

### **3.5. ‘Cultural exchange’ and labour negotiations as ‘part of the family’**

According to authorities and au pair legislation, the au pair scheme in Norway does not facilitate work migration, nor does it facilitate the exploitation of younger, foreign, less affluent women by wealthier Norwegian families. It is officially branded as cultural exchange (Gullikstad & Annfelt, forthcoming), with the contract called ‘Contract for cultural exchange between au pair and host family’ (UDI, 2014b). The very notion of cultural exchange is pregnant with symbolic value; here lies the potential of promoting the host culture and providing the opportunity for persons to learn about another culture in the supposed comfort of the private home. The concept of exchange suggests reciprocity between the involved parties. While this can easily be understood as an exchange of culture, the scheme actually facilitates an exchange relation wherein the au pair buys access to culture through work hours.

It may seem superfluous to even discuss cultural exchange as part of au pairing, as it is so obvious that the placement involves labour. The reason for doing so, however, is because the idea of cultural exchange is still highly present in au pair legislation, which shapes the conditions, if not the practice, of au pairing. Furthermore, the notion of cultural exchange is also often used to discuss the development of the au pair scheme in Norway, from the time when au pairing was still imagined to be a genuine way of going abroad on ‘cultural exchange’ to

the current scheme of work migration. Mariya Bikova writes that ‘the au-pair scheme in Norway has lost its cultural character and is now used as a channel for the import of cheap domestic labour’ (Bikova, 2010, p. 53). This appears to run contrary to Liarou’s argument that au pairing was always socio-economically motivated and motivated by lack of available servants (Liarou, 2015). The labour carried out, as suggested by Stenum, has remained the same for maids working in Danish families in the 20th century as for au pairs working in Denmark today. Young Norwegian women working as au pairs in the UK in the 1990s, for example, seem to have experienced the same kind of things: an employer/employee relation with a host family wherein the host family’s needs and wishes defined the au pair’s position in the household (Hemsing, 2003).

Nevertheless, the idea of cultural exchange may be part of au pairs’ motivation, and it influences the conceptualisation of au pairing in the Norwegian public sphere. In 2012, it was legislated that parents could no longer become au pairs. In further attempts by the government to enhance the cultural exchange aspect of au pairing after a substantial amount of public criticism in 2013, in which the documentary *Herskap og tenarar* (Sunde & Isungset, 2013) played a key part, legislation was changed. The amount of money host families had to pay towards au pairs’ Norwegian classes was slightly increased, and a quarantine was introduced for host families abusing the scheme. While such measures may or may not be effective ways to prevent exploitation by allegedly strengthening the cultural exchange aspect of the scheme, the content of the 30 hours a week of ‘light domestic work’ and childcare remains in the blue.

Judging from scholarly work and media coverage of the scheme, there is no doubt that au pairing is generally perceived as domestic work in Norway. Norwegian au pair agencies are also clear about this. The au pair-agency Energy Au Pair contains on its website the following advice for au pairs:

*After a while you will feel more comfortable and some au pairs feel that it is not all right any more to clean and tidy up for the family. Try not to have unrealistic*

*expectations and never be seduced into thinking that you are on holiday. You will no doubt have opportunities, **but first and foremost you are abroad to work.*** (Energy Au Pair, 2014, bold in original)

This description is also echoed by the host mum and the au pair in the documentary *Kvinne 2013: De gode hjelperne* ('Woman 2013: The Good Helpers') (Kårstad, 2013). Here, the host mum Ragnhild Borchgrevink lists her reasons for hiring an au pair:

*We have two demanding jobs ... so we need help in our daily lives in order to manage it all.... There should be no shame in hiring domestic help.... If we don't get help we'll get completely exhausted. And the one who will be working double shifts is me. That's just the way it is. There are few families where division of work is the other way around, where the father does most of the domestic work. And in the end, one gets so tired that one gets angry, bitter, and divorced. (Ibid., my translation)*

Borchgrevink highlights that her reason for hiring an au pair was her need for a domestic worker who could take on some of the domestic work that she, as a woman, would otherwise do. Her husband seems to have played no part, even though he is discursively present through the claim that both host parents had demanding jobs.

Au pairs mainly do domestic work and carework; everyday tasks seem to range from tidying and cleaning the house to cooking for the children and/or the whole family, cleaning up after dinner, walking children to and from kindergarten and school, and washing and ironing clothes. Like so many other domestic workers, their low-status labour is often 'valued in rhetoric as priceless, [but] not valued economically' (Anderson, 2009, p. 411). Their tasks are often similar to those of many other kinds of domestic workers (see, e.g., Anderson, 2000; Cox, 2006; Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003; Guitérrez-Rodríguez, 2010; Lutz, 2011; Parreñas, 2001; Pratt, 2004). Zuzana Búriková and Daniel Miller write about the feelings of

one of their au pair informants, Lucia, concerning her work for a family in the UK:

*there was no doubt that cleaning felt like work, like hard labour, closer to that of her male friends in the construction industry, but they were earning a great deal more money. This was labour she felt in her body, in aches and muscle strain and the need for a shower afterwards to deal with the sweat. (Búriková & Miller, 2010, pp. 65–6)*

Domestic work can be physically strenuous, even if each individual task is not so hard. Thus, if one follows the Norwegian au pair contract, it might not be so important how one defines 'light housework'. If an au pair does 'light housework' for five to seven hours a day, as this au pair does, she will become tired.

Au pairs are live-in and often tied to a specific employer through their visa, where they are supposed to be 'part of the family'. These aspects of au pair work, to some extent, separate it from other kinds of (migrant) domestic labour – certainly in a Norwegian context. This is not to suggest that neither au pairs nor host families actually believe that au pairs are part of the family, but the idea still circulates and produces a concrete and embodied situation (Búriková, 2006; Sollund, 2012b). Telling au pairs that they are 'part of the family' often serves to conceal the real power relationships at work, and this leads to confusion and exploitation. Employers can switch between considering the relationship contractual or familial, depending on what is most convenient for them (Anderson, 2000, p. 31). This is the position from which au pairs must negotiate working time and working hours.

These negotiations do not happen on equal terms. The fact that au pairs carry out live-in domestic work fundamentally structures their lives; the live-in situation may increase their working hours by blurring the boundaries between working time and spare time, it may isolate the au pairs and it may make it difficult for them to leave abusive positions as pointed out by Rosie Cox (2012). Furthermore,

Cox notes that ‘migration schemes that require domestic workers to live in their employers’ homes are a practical mechanism by which ideologies of women’s “natural” role are imposed upon workers whilst simultaneously making their work less visible’ (ibid., p. 34). This means that, in addition to often working too much in the first place (Búriková & Miller, 2010), when au pairs are asked to do tasks outside their remit, when there are changes to the working schedule at short notice or when they are asked to work extra – which au pairs frequently are (Cox, 2006, p. 101) – au pairs may not be in a position to negotiate.

The idea that au pairs are ‘part of the family’ inscribes, in a highly gendered way, a sense of duty on the au pairs that might make it more difficult for them to say no to extra work. Tkach (2014) points out that her informants had to negotiate with their host families over working hours and tasks, and that second-year au pairs, especially those who had experienced difficult host families, redirected their energy to activities outside the host family’s house while ‘maintaining distance with adults ... and shallow though friendly relationships with children’ (Tkach, 2014, p. 141). Distancing, in other words, seems to have been used as a coping strategy by experienced au pairs, and not just to position themselves as workers, but also to protect themselves from the potential pain of leaving behind children when their contract came to an end.

On behalf of the host families, ‘family’ discourse in which the au pair is portrayed as the ‘big sister’ can be used to ‘disguise the working relationship by using the discourse of the moral economy emphasizing cooperation and mutual responsibility’ (Hess & Puckhaber, 2004, p. 73). Búriková and Miller (2010), who carried out an ethnographic study on Slovak au pairs in London, note that only the host family has genuine control over the way in which the pseudo-family idiom is used, and argue that ‘far more au pairs will curse the model of the pseudo-family than claim to have benefitted from it’ (Búriková & Miller, 2010, p. 39). In a similar vein, Anderson makes an interesting point when she argues that:

*the term 'au pair' itself indicates that the au pair is an equal, and 'part of the family' is often used to denote equality. On the other hand this is a somewhat dewy-eyed view of families which, as has long been acknowledged, are far from equal places and are structured around status and hierarchy. (Anderson, 2009, p. 414)*

In other words, even if an au pair is treated as 'part of the family', this is no guarantee for respectful treatment or equality between the au pair and other family members.

The tension between being a 'member of the family' as well as an 'employee' is widely discussed (for discussions about employers' conceptualisations of this relationship, see, e.g., Kristensen, 2015; Sollund, 2010a; Sollund, 2010b; Stenum, 2010b, 2010c, 2011b). Cecilie Øien notes that even those of her informants with host families who followed the rules and integrated the au pair in family life 'did not regard the relationship between au pair and host family as a "proper family relationship" ... based on what she and her friends had experienced, combined with hearsay about other less fortunate au pairs' (Øien, 2009, p. 56). This means that, even in cases in which the relationship works out, the au pair scheme, itself, gives meaning to the relationship and prevents it from being interpreted by au pairs as a relationship between equal family members.

The unclear role of au pairs and the power hierarchy between au pairs and host parents sometimes becomes manifest – for example, in the way in which au pairs use or are told to use household space. Many au pairs report not feeling free to use communal areas such as the kitchen and living room, or being explicitly told not to use these rooms (Cox & Narula, 2003). On the other hand, some au pairs are concerned with not leaving an impression of their presence in the household, and may take care not to leave traces of, for example, having taken a shower or eaten something out of the fridge (Búriková & Miller, 2010, pp. 46–55). This is probably not without reason; Gavanas found that, in Swedish employers, there was tension in their attitude towards au pairs and other domestic workers, who were expected to be both 'invisible' and equal to them (Gavanas, 2006). The

hierarchies and unclear expectations in households that employ au pairs makes it difficult for these households to live up to what Karina M. Dalgas addresses as the ideal family that spends time together, shares meals and socialises out of their own free will (Dalgas, 2013). This is evident not least when au pairs feel the need to always 'keep the smile in place' while, at the same time, feeling anxious about disagreements or dissatisfactions in the family (Stenum, 2010c, pp. 76-7, my translation). However, au pairs not only negotiate with host families, but also (at least ideally) create and maintain relationships outside the house – sometimes as a coping strategy.

### **3.6. Au pairs' relationships**

Au pairs venture out of the house and find friends and sometimes partners. This might be a migration strategy (as discussed above), a coping strategy for keeping the host family at arm's length (Tkach, 2014) or a strategy for building networks outside the house for its own sake. In short, relationships may mean important networks and an increased sense of agency for au pairs. For au pairs in Norway, especially if they live outside Oslo and are not from the Philippines, opportunities for socialisation may be limited. A strong social network could mean the safety net of help, whether something goes wrong with the host family, with a complicated migration process or indeed with any aspect of life as an au pair. Búriková (2015) notes that her informants were keen to speak about working conditions to other au pairs in the neighbourhood, whenever they met coincidentally, in order to judge whether their own conditions were fair. This highlights both the importance of a social network and the relative isolation and precarious situation the au pair scheme produces for au pairs.

Regarding dating and sex, au pairs' sexuality appears somewhat loaded with stereotypes connected to promiscuity – at least in the context of the UK, in both contemporary (Cox, 2007) and historical times (Liarou, 2015, pp. 29-30). Búriková and Miller (2010) note that host families rarely allowed au pairs to have male

visitors in the house; yet, for the au pairs, boyfriends and romantic involvements in London were often some of the more important relations in their lives (Búriková & Miller, 2010, p. 140). Similarly, Tkach argues that her informants 'rely on their womanhood' to integrate into Norwegian society, through marrying Norwegian men (Tkach, 2014, p. 146). Heterosexuality thus appears to play a significant role in au pairing. The wider field of sexuality research offers many perspectives on sexuality and au pairing, and I return to these perspectives in part four, 'Intersectionality at work', in which I focus, in particular, on au pairs' imagined heterosexuality and its connection to their role in the private households in which they carry out highly gendered labour (see particularly section 4.3., 'Processes of marginalisation in au pair work').

### **3.7. Class, race, ethnicity and gender in au pairing**

Au pairing is often imagined as a life-cycle service, as most clearly reflected in legislation stating that people can only be au pairs for one or two years. This, combined with the notion of au pairing as cultural exchange, can lead to the position being imagined as a temporary situation and a stepping-stone. This 'is an important feature of au pairing which differentiates it from some other forms of domestic service, such as cleaning or housekeeping' (Williams & Baláz, 2004, p. 1831, see also Liarou, 2015, p. 21 and Anderson, 2009, pp. 417–8). In a Norwegian context, the result of this conceptualisation is visible in the legislation, in which au pairing is imagined as suitable for young, middle-class women without children who are likely to return to their home countries upon the end of their contract. The emphasis on cultural exchange and the fact that au pairs have to leave Norway after au pairing undermines the work au pairs do, and exacerbates the processes of marginalisation based on class, race, ethnicity and gender, which I focus on here.

As already noted, au pairing is part of a longer historical legacy of paid domestic labour. Cox notes that 'the servant problem' was the historical 'problem' of the

upper classes in finding good servants; they complained that servants did not know their place and were insubordinate and lazy (Cox, 2006, p. 8). While the contemporary employers of the domestic workers Cox interviewed did not use these terms, they were nevertheless concerned with distancing themselves from the workers in symbolic terms (ibid., p. 115). In the Nordic context, on the other hand, employers actively discourage au pairs from using titles such as 'sir' and 'madam', and some imagine themselves to be living in a classless society (Gavanas, 2006, p. 319) in which displays of wealth are taboo (Kristensen, 2015, p. 217). To emphasise this, one of Kristensen's informants stated that 'a lot of people think that you have to be extremely rich to have an au pair. But actually it doesn't cost more than an old rusty car. It costs less than that' (ibid.). These accounts from employers suggest a lack of awareness of the class inequalities between themselves and au pairs. These inequalities may or may not be real in monetary terms when the au pairs arrive, but, in the au pair scheme, they seem to be produced as au pairs carry out the 'boring' domestic work that host families outsource. When an au pair is comparable to an 'old rusty car', she is also commodified in a way that indicates that a significant class difference is produced by the au pair scheme through the cost of an au pair.

Ethnicity and race also play a substantial role in the way in which au pairing is imagined, legislated and performed. Au pairing, along with other kinds of domestic work, has its roots in colonialism and slavery (Anderson, 2000), and ethnicity frequently surfaces in au pair literature through stories of host families' preferences for certain 'types' of au pairs based on ethnic stereotypes (see, e.g., Anderson, 2000, pp. 152-3; Durin, 2015; Gavanas, 2006, pp. 326-7). Furthermore, the slave analogy surfaces discursively in the literature (see, e.g., Liarou, 2008, cited in Cox, 2012, p. 36; Cox & Narula, 2003, p. 342; Mellini et al., 2007, p. 52). This is also the case in the aforementioned documentary *Kvinne 2013: De gode hjelperne* (Kårstad, 2013), in which the au pair in the depicted family, Jackylene G. Boncodin, presents her views on au pair work:

*If only the family will treat us well, especially for us Filipinas, we can do our work a lot better and we can do a very hard job without even complaining. But only if they respect us and treat us as a human and not a slave.... Being an au pair is a good thing to have on your CV. (Ibid.)*

Boncodin argues the case for the 'good Filipina worker' (Ong, 2006), but also reminds of the conditions of this work and its roots in colonialism. For Boncodin, au pairing is good to have on the CV and a strategy for escaping unemployment in the Philippines, and the most important thing for her is to be treated well. This is also the criterion she uses to draw the distinction between a 'human' and a 'slave'. The analogy highlights the unequal power relation between host family and domestic worker, which the host family must take responsibility for, as it has the upper hand in the relation.

This slave analogy and the ethnic stereotypes, that contribute to racialising au pairs and marking them as different from host families, run parallel to legislation suggesting that au pairing is not only not work, but a temporary cultural exchange between two equal parties. One could argue that the legislation relies on a specific racialisation of the au pair scheme as white and middle-class, echoing the way in which domestic service for black women in the US was an occupational cul-de-sac, while for white women doing the same work it was a road to other, better jobs (Williams & Baláz, 2004, p. 1831).

Interestingly, in Norway, media coverage of au pairing increased at the same time that the number of Filipina au pairs began to rise substantially, around 2006–2007.<sup>9</sup> Filipina au pairs, especially in Norway and Denmark, have also been discussed in scholarly literature to an extent to which other nationalities of au pairs have not (see, e.g., Bikova, 2010; Dalgas, 2013, 2014; Sollund, 2010b; Stenum, 2011a; Øien, 2009); this is possibly in relation to the fact that Norwegian and

---

<sup>9</sup> A search on retriever.no of Norwegian print media against the term 'au pair' brought up 111 articles published in 2005 and 458 published in 2009. A total of 461 au pair visas were issued in 2005, compared to 1,320 in 2009.

Danish authorities ignored Filipino authorities' ban on au pairing in Norway, as well as other countries, which was in place from 1998 to 2010 (Stenum, 2010a). Øien, who has a complete chapter on Filipina au pairs in her comprehensive report on au pairing in Norway, states that the reason for this is that:

*The continuously growing number of au pairs from the Philippines draws attention to an increasing trend among au pairs to focus on au pairing as work... What they bring with them are not only different strategies and motivations compared to the expectations of European youth which the scheme was originally intended for; they also arrive with a different concept of what the relationship between au pair and employer should be. (Øien, 2009, p. 71)*

What this quote suggests is that au pairing was indeed imagined to be white, and the presence of Filipinas disturbed this image. This becomes clear from Øien's indication that Filipina au pairs see au pairing as work, while European au pairs do not see it in this way. It seems fitting here to remind again of how the skin colour or perceived race of the domestic worker changes the interpretation of their work; from a stepping stone to something else, to a career in low-status work in the cases where the domestic worker is racialised as black (Williams & Baláz, 2004, p. 1831).

There may of course be a number of other reasons why Filipina au pairs receive so much scholarly attention; there are presumably a lot of Filipina au pairs compared to other nationalities, Filipinas in Norway and Denmark are well-organised in ex-pat societies and churches and thus relatively easy to recruit even if they are live-in domestic workers. The ban and the diplomatic issues with Filipino authorities also meant that bribes was part and parcel of what it meant to go abroad as an au pair to Norway, and this in itself added to the already precarious situation (Stenum, 2010a). The research on Filipina au pairs has provided the field with invaluable knowledge of the various practices of the scheme, reasons for migrating, pros and cons for the au pairs, and so on.

Yet, stereotypes of Filipina au pairs circulate; they are kind, smiling, servile, hard-working, self-sacrificing mothers/daughters who provide for their family through remittances and are primarily motivated by the opportunity to work; however, they are also constructed as vulnerable victims (Stenum, 2010a; Øien, 2009). These stereotypes of Filipinas are circulated along with the official number of Filipina au pairs in Norway and Denmark, which suggests that virtually all au pairs are Filipinas. I would argue that this also leads to a dangerous conflation: all au pairs are Filipinas, and all Filipinas are kind, smiling, servile, motivated to work and so on, thus all au pairs are kind, smiling, servile, motivated to work and so on. The stereotypes connected to Filipina au pairs thus not only affect Filipinas and other Asian women, but also affect the way in which the au pair scheme is more broadly ethnicised. While it is clear that Filipina au pairs have certain structural challenges that European au pairs are less likely to have (as they may be more economically advantaged, may be in a position to leave the host family more easily, may be more likely to find other work and so on), it is not necessarily the case that Filipina au pairs are the most marginalised. While it is important for researchers to focus on the most marginalised groups, we should not presume to know who the most marginalised are or how processes of marginalisation happen. I address this in more detail, below (see section 4.3., 'Processes of marginalisation in au pair work').

Gender is another aspect that fundamentally shapes au pairing, from the role of the au pair in the household to the tasks she carries out and the way in which au pairing serves as a particular kind of migration regime (Cox, 2012). Furthermore, the narrative of au pairing as a stepping-stone to something else also features in relation to gender. As one of Kristensen's informants, a most mum, stated, 'I enjoy watching them change from young and insecure girls into more confident, competent women' (Kristensen, 2015, p. 216). In imagining au pairing as a transition from girlhood to womanhood, the informant draws on a development and civilising narrative that enables her to perceive the employment as a favour

granted to the au pair. This is also related to the way in which, when Gavanas's informants bought domestic services, they drew on their Swedishness to explain how gender equality-orientated they were (Gavanas, 2006). By implication, gender equal Swedes and Norwegians who like it when women are (or become) liberated (or mature) do not think of themselves as reinforcing gender stereotypes by outsourcing domestic work and carework to other women. It seems that gender equality is inherent in them, and in the development narrative, where gender equality serves as a marker to distinguish those who belong in the nation from those who do not (Keskinen, 2011, 2012), there seems to be a presumption that their inherent gender equality can be transferred to supposedly less advantaged women – even if these women play the part of underpaid domestic worker.

However, the work of au pairs is highly gendered, and in some cases this is made explicit. One of Lenka Pelechova's informants in the UK, a woman employing a domestic worker, made an interesting statement that contrasted the claims made by the Swedish and Norwegian host families. The informant explicitly gendered domestic work and carework and claimed that 'for me, it is like having a wife, another wife, because she [au pair] does all the things that a wife would do for her husband' (Pelechova, 2015, p. 193). This sliding transition between servant and wife is interesting, yet, while the tasks of a wife and a domestic worker may be very similar, one important difference is that the wife manages the household while the domestic worker does not (Anderson, 2000, p. 162). It remains unclear whether the informant in Pelechova's study meant to say that she had a wife or that her husband had an extra wife – perhaps both were happening at the same time. Either way, Pelechova points out that au pairs are predominantly managed by the women in the households (see also Anderson, 2000, p. 162), while the men remain at a distance; she suggests that the reason for this is that the domestic sphere is not a male space (Pelechova, 2015).

As Cox (2007) shows, there may also be other reasons for host dads to refrain from interacting with au pairs, other than not perceiving domestic work as their domain. Au pairs are sometimes represented in the media as highly sexualised, and thus a threat to the host mum and a possible source of pleasure for the host dad (Cox, 2007). This means that host dads' absence from au pair management may be as much due to nervousness about the proximity of a young woman in the household as to refusal to get involved in domestic chores (even if one reason does not exclude the other) (Búriková & Miller, 2010, p. 138). The cultural fantasy of the coupling of the older man and the younger (perhaps vulnerable) woman is readily available, and in the public construction of au pairs, at least in the UK, au pairs' imagined promiscuity is added to the mix (Cox, 2007; Hemsing, 2003).

### **3.8. Conclusion**

Using the nation as a frame of reference, as I have partly done in this part of the introductory article, is a double-edged sword. It implies the risk of methodological nationalism (Braidotti, 2010; Sassen, 2010) and even exceptionalism, on the one hand, and the risk of universalising a particular historical and geographical situation, on the other. However, au pairing is shaped by national legislation, and the cultural conditions for au pairing are produced in a specific geographic space with its unique genealogy of paid and unpaid carework and domestic work. This is true even when the genealogy is similar to that of neighbouring countries, and even when this genealogy looks quite different across various geographical locations within a nation.

I started this part by arguing that the field of au pair research could be seen as a field centred on the often empty signifier 'au pair', which must be defined anew in each context. What should be clear enough at this point, however, is that the term 'au pair', does something, and using the label to some extent, distinguishes au pairs from other types of domestic workers. It produces a particular type of worker by referring either to legislation or to the culturally recognisable practice

of au pairing as it appears through legislation and media representation. Au pairing thus carries with it specific meanings that translate into migration policy, cultural attitudes and work practices, drawing on an, at times, slightly different set of images relative to those attached to other kinds of domestic work. In au pairing, the nation is brought explicitly into the equation through the notion of cultural exchange and the fact that au pairs are supposed to learn the language while living with a host family. There is, in other words, a particular conflation between the home and the nation in the scheme. This may suggest that the troubles and negotiations that are part and parcel of au pairing are also part and parcel of larger issues for the nation.

I have discussed the core themes that shaped my research and motivated the research questions of this study. The lack of clarity about what au pairing is and the evident tension between different understandings of the practice suggest that an investigation of the way in which au pairs understand au pairing, as carried out in the articles “It’s not much” and ‘From intimate relations to citizenship?’ is fruitful. In these articles, I also consider the forms agency takes for au pairs, and how it relates to issues of migration and citizenship. Furthermore, another perspective on the scheme is explored in an investigation of representations of au pairing in the article ‘Framing the au pair’. These materials provide important insights into the themes of work and the processes of marginalisation, inclusion and exclusion, which I address throughout the thesis.

In the following part, I go further into the latter two themes by addressing intersectionality at work, wherein work is performative as something that works on the bodies in question. What follows is a continuation of what I have discussed here, and I draw on this literature – along with my own research – in the process of analysing the ways in which various categories, such as class, race, ethnicity and gender, shape and are shaped by the label and activity of au pairing. I find the concept of intersectionality a useful tool for addressing the various processes of marginalisation that are hidden in plain sight as part of au pair work.

#### **4. Intersectionality at work**

In this part, I address what I have called 'intersectionality at work'. While I do not use the concept of intersectionality in the articles of this thesis, it was still an implicit lens for my work. In turning to it here, I hope to bring together the analytical contribution of the three articles and this introductory chapter through a discussion of the situated ways in which class, gender, race, ethnicity, visa status and religion interact in the context of au pair work. In other words, I investigate the intersectional dynamics in au pairing (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013, p. 785), and I do this through an examination of the aforementioned categories. Kimberlé Crenshaw argues that categories such as those listed above have meaning and consequences, and the consequences spring out of the values and the social hierarchies that are attached to these values (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1296). Intersectionality is thus 'an analytic tool to capture and engage contextual dynamics of power' (Cho et al., 2013, p. 788).

Intersectionality has its roots in political activism and law, and carries a certain normative and political weight. Part of its core is that no single category can be isolated from the others, and it foregrounds the social dynamics and relations that constitute subjects as parts of larger power hierarchies (ibid.). I want to draw on the political weight of the concept of intersectionality and claim that an intersectional analysis must always be thorough, nuanced and, most importantly, situated, in order not to reproduce the processes of marginalisation that one attempts to understand and address. This is also a strategy of avoiding essentialism while, at the same time, leaving room for 'group politics' (Crenshaw, 1991). The meaning of each category, in other words, is situated and must be analysed and located in each empirical context, in a specific social space and time (Cho et al., 2013, p. 807). Furthermore, categories are not so much identities as they are descriptions of social structures, the production of subjectivities and structural inequalities, with the hope of change.

Although the au pair scheme is constructed as something between work and cultural exchange, au pairs work in the host families' homes. In this part, I focus on the practice of work as a structuring principle for understanding the au pair scheme in contemporary Norway. Work is a practice that structures the everyday for au pairs, and is central to the way in which au pairing acquires meaning. This idea finds support in my informants' narratives as well as in the wider cultural field. Work as a structuring principle – as well as concrete practice – was a focus in the interviews and analyses. During the process of analysis, it became clear that it would be necessary to look at the meanings attributed to work in the au pair scheme in a broader sense than merely the work au pairs perform. Through the study, work appeared as a nodal point (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 26) through which everyday practice, social relations, meaning making, material conditions and legal structures all connected.

As I showed in part three, 'Au pairing and live-in migrant domestic work', au pair work takes on meaning in relation to categories such as class, gender, race and ethnicity. There is a substantial amount of literature on migrant domestic workers around the world, in addition to the au pair research already addressed, which includes thorough empirical, ethnographic and theoretical accounts of migrant domestic work (see, e.g., Anderson, 2000, 2007; Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003; Guitérrez-Rodríguez, 2010; Isaksen, 2010; Lutz, 2011, 2008; Parreñas, 2001; Pratt, 2004 to mention a few excellent studies). I draw on this detailed knowledge of migrant domestic workers around the world when thinking about au pairing in Norway, yet I must emphasise that my goal here is to remain contextually and geographically situated. That is not to say that there is necessarily anything particular about this time, place or category of worker, but rather that knowledge production happens in a particular context.

The au pair scheme is an interesting and productive site for looking at the various ways in which intersecting social categories can be understood when analysed in relation to work. Broader social structures shape the meaning of work, and to

understand the rich stories my informants told me about themselves, as well as the particular constructions of labour in the au pair documentaries, I had to situate and contextualise my analysis of these social structures. I attempted to do this by locating the au pairs' stories in a broader story of work. The aim of this part is to map out which categories intersect in the particular situation of au pairing in Norway, and to describe how this intersection occurs. These categories intersect at the site of paid domestic work, and I start by defining what I mean by 'work'. Following this, I connect au pairing to a specific historical practice of paid domestic labour. Drawing on Crenshaw, I discuss and define the concept of 'intersectionality' as a useful way to 'do' empirically grounded theorising about the impact of work on working bodies.

#### **4.1. Domestic work and carework, work and labour**

First, however, a few notes about what I mean by 'work' or 'labour'. In answering the question 'what is domestic work?', Anderson, drawing on Marx and Engels, notes that "The notion of "production of human beings themselves" is broader than simply the production of labour power, and is a more accurate description of household work' (Anderson, 2000, p. 13). I would add to this that what I attempt to do in holding up work as the overarching and structuring principle for the discussion that follows is to focus, not only on what is produced through the labour power exercised (in Anderson's account, human beings), but also on how the social and cultural meanings of the work performed affect the worker. The status of the work, the salary, the emotional and affective requirements of the work and the way in which the conditions for the work interact with migrant status are critical for understanding au pairing.

I use two sets of concepts interchangeably throughout the thesis: 'domestic work' and 'carework', and 'labour' and 'work'. Regarding domestic work and carework, Encarnación Guitérrez-Rodríguez, amongst others, argues that 'it is utterly impossible to separate domestic and carework from each other as the skills and

tasks deployed in them overlap... domestic work is intrinsically linked to sustaining personal well-being even when the task involved is only cleaning the stairs' (Guitérrez-Rodríguez, 2010, p. 4).

Domesticity and care are intertwined also on the level of meaning in relation to au pairing. In Norway, the private home is highly significant as a gendered symbolic site of social reproduction (Gullestad, 1989; Solheim, 1998). Most people own their homes, and significant sums are spent on maintenance and redecoration (Sørheim, 2012). In this context, cleaning stairs may not be an insignificant task at all. It may, on the contrary, be crucial for the production of a 'proper home', which many families hire au pairs to achieve. Furthermore, the work of au pairs in Norway, even if it mainly concerns cleaning, still often involves various forms of childcare, as characterised by the general tendency of domestic work and carework to involve several tasks at once (Anderson, 2000, p. 12).

I also use the words 'labour' and 'work' interchangeably, though I am aware of their slightly different connotations. Work might refer to waged labour or so-called productive labour, while labour might be seen as 'the activity that reproduces biological life' (Weeks, 2011, p. loc. 302). Paid domestic work – even when it is not, in fact, labelled as such – breaks down this divide by sometimes being paid and sometimes not, sometimes being performed by family members and sometimes not, and often but not exclusively taking place in the sphere of the home. It is also clear when looking at the case of au pairs that women's unpaid work in the home and paid domestic labour cannot be separated; it is precisely the seeming impossibility of redistributing domestic work between family members that produces a situation in which a domestic worker is hired – at least, this is one of the more common explanations put forward (see, e.g., Pelechova, 2015).

#### **4.2. Situated intersectionality**

A lot of the scholarly literature on au pairs is concerned with work – and for good reason. The work of au pairs is not formally acknowledged (in legislation) as work, yet it is blatantly obvious that what au pairs do is, in fact, work – otherwise, host families would not employ them. Furthermore, a lot of the research on au pairs shows that they work long hours and carry out an extensive range of tasks in the household. They sometimes even work outside the household, for which some negotiate extra pay while others are not able to do so. The type of work au pairs do must be seen in connection with both traditional unpaid women's work in the home as well as with servitude. Considering the role of imagined 'sameness' in Norway (Gullestad, 2002), this means that it is more comfortable to leave the frame of 'cultural exchange' intact. The notion of cultural exchange in the au pair scheme has indeed been the driving force behind changes in au pair legislation, which has focused on more money for au pairs' English classes as well as a ban on mothers becoming au pairs (Gullikstad & Annfelt, forthcoming). Acknowledging that au pairing is work would mean that there would suddenly be numerous Norwegian families with a live-in domestic worker who is neither a family member nor a properly paid employee. In this sense, drawing attention to au pair work has the potential to expose, rather directly, the inequalities produced by the scheme in the way it is currently practiced. These inequalities specifically relate to class, race, ethnicity and gender, along with migrant status and sexuality, as I return to below.

Work plays a role in everyday situations, and by extension it has a role in subjectivity formation through surveillance, discipline and self-regulation (Butler, 1999; McDowell, 2008). The point of departure here is a specific time and place wherein work comes to mean and do particular things and refer to a context in which a specific type of work is carried out. The heading for this part, 'intersectionality at work', refers to this double meaning. Intersectionality can help shed light on the meaning of work in this particular context by drawing

attention to the multiple structures that are intertwined in this particular situation, and that shape au pairs as specific kinds of subjects. I argue here that the way in which different axes of power intersect and shape subject formations are activated by the work that au pairs do. In other words, work serves as a structuring principle for how and which categories intersect with each other, or what I call 'situated intersectionality'.

Intersectionality can reveal complex processes of marginalisation (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). Although au pairs have a wide range of experiences, the structural frames of au pairing nevertheless provide the basis for the scheme and its practice. Pointing towards these structural frames, Cox argues that:

*Au pairs are not poorly treated only because they do work which is undervalued in our society; nor is it only because they are migrants, subject to racist stereotyping and marginalised by their visa status; nor is it only because they are isolated within their employers' homes, unable to negotiate collectively or leave without risking losing both housing and employment. They are poorly treated because within au pairing all these elements come together. (Cox, 2015, pp. 244-5)*

What I take from this is that it is not sufficient to think with the 'common' identity categories that usually feature in intersectional approaches, such as class, race, gender and sexuality. In addition, au pair work produces a situation in which a number of practical problems, possible discrimination grounds and social and structural challenges come together and contribute to producing a situation of marginalisation for the worker. In the following, I look more closely at the ways in which this happens, using the lens of intersectionality.

The concept of intersectionality has become extremely wide-ranging and often very productive in gender studies and beyond, perhaps proving itself to be, at the same time, both incomplete and promising (Davis, 2008). There is a significant amount of literature and debate around the scope and content of intersectionality, which I will not cover here (although the following authors,

among others, provide some interesting insights into these definitions and debates: Cho et al., 2013; Collins, 1998; Davis, 2008; Lewis, 2013; Lutz, Vivar, & Supik, 2011; Manalansan, 2006; McCall, 2005; Purkayastha, 2012). I use intersectionality here as a sensitising tool (Berg, Flemmen, & Gullikstad, 2010) to draw attention to different processes of marginalisation at the site of work.

This conceptualisation of intersectionality is indebted to Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991). Working from the perspective of legal studies, Crenshaw coined the term as a way to broaden feminist and anti-racist movements, as black women's experiences were rendered invisible in both. Crenshaw notes that:

*With Black women as a starting point, it becomes more apparent how dominant conceptions of discrimination condition us to think about subordination as disadvantage occurring along a single categorical axis. I want to suggest further that this single-axis framework erases Black women in the conceptualization, identification and remediation of race and sex discrimination. (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140)*

Toril Moi describes Crenshaw's intersectionality as 'a situation and an experience', and 'an intellectual diagnosis of complexity and marginalization' as well as a solution (Moi, 2014). It *is*, or perhaps more accurately it *can be*, an empirically grounded theoretical tool. I use it here as a way to explore the way in which intersecting structures of racism, sexism, classism and other identity categories, markers of similarity or difference, or discrimination grounds, such as visa status, religion, age or sexuality, structured the experiences and lives of my informants, localised in a specific geographic and temporal context doing a specific kind of work. I furthermore draw on Moi's argument that thinking with Crenshaw's intersectionality may help us work in a way in which the meanings of concepts or categories are secured through the lived, and not the other way around, wherein we use concepts to secure lived reality (ibid.). The concepts that feature in au pairing that I discuss below – gendered labour, ethnicisation and

racialisation, migrant status and citizenship, religion and sexuality – are thus defined in dialogue with the situation of au pair work.

I want to emphasise the necessity of localisation in a specific time and place, because there is a need for ‘spatial, political and economic locations ... to be treated as contextual and temporal’ (Anthias, 2012, p. 103). Bandana Purkayastha (2012) points to the importance of this in her critique of intersectionality as being difficult to apply to contexts outside the global north and west, arguing that:

*concepts such as ‘women of color’ — which act as an effective framework for indicating the social location of these women in Western Europe and North America, and continuing global hierarchies between countries in the global North and South—do not work as well if we wish to track the array of the axes of power and domination within countries along with existing global-level hierarchies. (Purkayastha, 2012, p. 59)*

Thus, social categories, as well as the words used to describe and theorise these categories, should be sensitive to context. When drawing on categories such as gender, class, race, religion, sexuality and so on, I perceive these categories to be processual and as part of specific (but not isolated) kinds of structural inequalities that produce certain subjects – here, the au pair. By defining the categories I draw on as local, I hope to avoid making assumptions about the various categories’ meanings outside the context under study, and instead to focus on what categories come into play, or become meaningful, in the particular case of au pairing in Norway.

As the quote from Cox on page 70 clearly shows, au pairing is a productive site for exploring processes of marginalisation; this became very clear through the stories of my informants. In the three articles of this thesis, I point to various social categories that become effective and important. Au pair work is obviously gendered, as well as culturally ethnicised and classed; this means that workers, also, are ethnicised and classed (Stubberud, 2015). Au pairs’ age is sometimes

relevant, as is their religion, visa status and sexual orientation. My particular goal here is not to reiterate social categories that contribute to the marginalisation of au pairs, but rather to look more closely at how – or perhaps even why – marginalisation occurs. I do not see these categories as descriptive, but rather as relational and comparative, as they indicate difference from a norm in addition to the ability to be made and unmade in the everyday (Svendsen, 2014, p. 14). This making and unmaking is of key importance; how do the various categories such as those listed above get made and unmade in the context of au pairing?

This approach allows me to address and reflect upon some overarching themes connected to the research questions I ask in this thesis, such as the way in which au pairing is understood by au pairs, as well as how au pairing is constructed in the public sphere. I address these themes, below, by discussing the processes of marginalisation and the way in which various categories are evoked through the activity of domestic work. How au pairing is constituted as simultaneously work and non-work is also related to this, as the activity of domestic work draws on the meanings of the categories invoked, such as gender, and gives the activity specific meaning in the context in which the work is performed – namely the home. In terms of the forms agency takes for au pairs, a lot of the negotiations I discuss in the first two articles of this thesis concern au pairs dealing with marginalisation and finding room to act within the scheme, given their immediate resources. The last research question is the one I mainly focus on answering here – namely: Which processes of marginalisation, inclusion and exclusion become active in the production of au pairing and the figure of the au pair?

#### **4.3. Processes of marginalisation in au pair work**

Gender is a category that, although generally not explicitly addressed by my informants or in the documentaries I analysed, nevertheless saturates the au pair scheme. The work involved in au pairing is traditional women's work in the sense that it is underpaid or unpaid, undervalued and involves a set of skills that

women are imagined to possess (Pérez, 2015; Stubberud, 2015). Gender thus features as a category in au pairing through the historical genealogy of women's work, as indicated in the contextualisation above. This genealogy relies on gender as a symbolic structure, wherein femininity is the primary symbolic object in a binary and hierarchical system. In this symbolic structure, gender is a mythological system in a self-referencing chain of meanings (Solheim, 1998, pp. 18–9). The binary opposition between gendered bodies is imagined through a symbolic representation of the female body as the opposite of the male body. Jorun Solheim states that 'the way I see it, this opposition is modelled on heterosexual intercourse as the basic gender-figure, with the nuclear family as the "natural" frame of reference' (ibid., p. 23, my translation).

Heteronormativity and the heterosexual contract is thus a key structure for the way in which au pairing works, and the 'women' and 'women's tasks' that I discuss throughout this thesis are produced as such within this structure. Here, I apply a deconstructive approach to gender in a highly heteronormative and gendered field of domestic work that takes place in the private home of the idealised nuclear family – the place in which the nation is reproduced (Collins, 1998). Here, the bodies of the family members are produced in hierarchical relation to one another, with gender as an (imagined) important category. Domestic labour is part of the production of gender and the maintenance of the hierarchy in the household; it reproduces gender difference and, through the continued devaluation of domestic labour, maintains patriarchal power.

Solheim is concerned with the boundaries in and around the physical and the symbolic female body, and I find this interesting when thinking about gender in the au pair scheme. While the physical body of the au pair is often without boundaries – in the sense that her presence in the house of the host family requires negotiation of, for example, her right to privacy or the more serious matter of the risk of sexual abuse – she can also be seen as a symbolic marker and maintainer of already established gender boundaries. Geraldine Pratt notes that

chronic violations of privacy (or, I would add, simply the possibility of this violation taking place), wherein employers 'move in and out of domestic workers' rooms without the occupants consent, both instantiate the insecurity of domestic workers' rights, and reproduce hegemonic understandings of domestic workers as women with no firm boundaries of their own from which to claim individual rights' (Pratt, 2004, p. 98). Yet while the au pair, herself, appears without boundaries, her presence in the house nevertheless represents a redrawing of gendered boundaries in the household. Domestic work and carework is (re)assigned as women's work, and thus whatever gender equality policies exist in the public sphere, the private sphere of the household can be kept 'clean', both literally and symbolically, from the gender mess that gender equality, in practice, may entail. Yet gender in au pairing always intersects with other categories, most notably ethnicity and race, as I argue in 'Framing the au pair' (Stubberud, 2015).

Filipina au pairs hold a special place in the representation of and debates around au pairing in Norway, to such an extent that it seems that although not all Filipinas are au pairs, all au pairs are Filipinas (Stubberud, 2015). As one of my informants put it, she was surprised to be 'mistaken' for a maid, and argued that the host family had made a mistake in hiring her – a young, white European – when they really needed an Asian woman (Stubberud, 2015). The reason, she said, was that the host family wanted her to do domestic work – mainly cleaning – and not childcare, to which she thought herself better suited. Carol Wolkowitz, drawing on Anderson (2000), notes that 'the worker is employed as much to carry dirt's stigma as to labour, and is metaphorically racialised by her association with dirt' (Wolkowitz, 2002, p. 502). Dirt, like labour, clings to people, and this seems to tap into what my informant perceived as problematic regarding her role in the household. Through her association with the dirt of the household, she found herself to be racialised; and while she was not actually *becoming* a Filipina au pair, she was not completely *not becoming* so, either (Stubberud, 2015).

This indicates that racism and processes of racialisation and ethnicisation are currently connected to doing dirty work, in general, and a particular form of ethnicisation of labour occurs in connection to domestic work and carework (Chow, 2002). I use the words 'race' and 'ethnicity' here because they are different, but connected. When au pairs in Norway are imagined to be Filipinas, they are ethnicised: they are imagined to be poor enough to want to work under the conditions that the au pair scheme offers, and they are attributed certain qualities that supposedly make them particularly good domestic workers. This process of ethnicisation, however, is connected to wider processes of racialisation. There is no tidy way to keep these two concepts apart. Ethnicity, as the term is currently used in Europe, often appears as a stand-in for race, 'to describe both what was formerly known as "race" and distinct ethnic groups that were not specifically marked by "race" relations' (Svendsen, 2014, p. 57). Race, in other words, seems to refer more to visible difference, while ethnicity concerns the 'cultural stuff' that may or may not be visible (ibid.). In the au pair scheme, processes of racialisation and ethnicisation are connected; while individual au pairs may be subject to ethnic stereotypes, when au pairing is imagined to be something that visibly different women do (i.e. Asian women, wherein Norwegian women are imagined as white), this is closer to racialisation.

Au pairs in Norway enter into a broader structure of processes of racialisation, while their specific labour, at this point in time, is primarily ethnicised. Rey Chow (2002) points to two methodological paradigms for studying ethnicity. She argues that 'ethnicity exists in modernity as a boundary – a line of exclusion – that nonetheless pretends to be a nonboundary', wherein ethnicity is either 'culture' – inherent in groups of people who live separate from each other, where belonging can be performative – or a 'politics of ethnicity' – wherein ethnicity is a potential source of oppression (Chow, 2002, p. 31). Chow argues, however, that in both of these paradigms, 'what appears to have been omitted is a manner of theorizing in which ethnicity would be understood, structurally, as part of an already

biopoliticized economic relation' (ibid., p. 32). In other words, a social boundary that, through labour, can mark something as 'foreign and inferior' and project it onto imagined outsiders (ibid., p. 35), with economic consequences. Chow states that foreignness is produced from within privileged societies in relation to hierarchical divisions of labour. This 'ethnic' marker is particularly clear in the case of women, especially migrant women, doing paid or unpaid domestic work. The labour, itself, constructs the labourer as 'an ethnic' because:

*she is commodified in specific ways, because she has to pay for her living by performing certain kinds of work, while these kinds of work ... continues to reduce the one who performs them to the position of the outsider, the ethnic. (Chow, 2002, p. 34)*

Here, Chow highlights the way in which ethnicity and gender depend on a mutually co-constitutive relation with labour that (re)produces a specific class relation. However, I would argue that other categories, such as migrant status, sexuality and religion, could be equally – if not more – important in some contexts. In other words, it is the act of labouring that brings these categories together in specific contexts – and while ethnicity may be a key category in the production of an outsider, it may not always be the most important one.

The au pair scheme in Norway is currently (imagined to be) practiced in a way that produces this situation. Au pairs are ethnicised as Filipinas, and the practice of au pairing is therefore 'explained' through global class inequalities. 'Global class inequalities' is a shorthand way of referring to the global economic differences that produce certain patterns of migration. This leads to a mutually reinforcing effect, wherein it is a well known secret that au pair work is undervalued and underpaid (au pairs who arrive to work are presumed to be economically worse off than the Norwegians who employ them), and thus the low pay and low status are legitimised, as they are imagined to offer 'better' pay and working conditions than the au pairs would have had in their home countries. Through this logic, au pairs are constructed as victims of global

economic inequality who should be grateful for their meagre earnings and limited rights. While the situation for many au pairs may indeed be that of an economic migrant who has good reason to be happy, relatively speaking, for an au pair job in Norway, my primary concern is nevertheless the effect of this particular imagining of au pairs as a specific kind of migrant domestic worker.

To return to Chow, one of her key points relates to the construction of 'the outsider'. It seems that in a context like Norway – although the same would hold true for other Nordic countries, in which sameness is (still) a key principle and racism, colonialism and colonial complicity are largely denied (Gullestad, 2002; Hübinette & Lundström, 2011; Keskinen, Tuori, Irni, & Mulinari, 2009; Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012) – the imagined borders around the nation are maintained by constructing some people inside of the nation as outsiders (Fortier, 2008). This marginalisation can occur on a number of axes, and it seems that the process or site of labour is one such axis, alongside visible markers of 'difference' such as skin colour or religious markers such as Muslims wearing a veil (Stubberud, forthcoming). The combination of migration and work that is gendered, classed and ethnicised overshadows au pairs' whiteness and middle-class belonging (for those this applies to), as I showed in the example of my informant who argued that the host family had 'misread' her, constructing her as an ethnicised and racialised working class subject (Stubberud, 2015).

The downward class mobility that is part and parcel of the experience of many au pairs (Pérez, 2015) seems to involve a sense of loss. This sense of loss, which is part of what is affectively negotiated in the au pair scheme, relates to a negotiation of being marginalised through a loss of class status as much as through the processes of racialisation and gendering (Stubberud, 2015). Yet the au pair scheme seems to appeal to some middle-class women as a migration route. Mirza A. Pérez (2015) suggests that this relates to what she calls 'the cosmopolitan dilemma'. She argues that au pairing is a form of aspirational migration that draws on imaginary social mobility and cultural capital, wherein

the 'adventure' of au pairing, exemplified by au pair agencies as travelling and language learning in the US context (and in Norway, through the political framing of au pairing as 'cultural exchange'), disguises the host nation's underlying desire for affordable domestic workers. The dilemma Pérez refers to is the discrepancy between the au pair's 'dream of international travel and ... the reality of exhausting childcare and demeaning domestic work' (Pérez, 2015, p. 214).

The underpaid and undervalued labour of au pairs activates various processes of discrimination, marginalisation and devaluation of the persons performing the work, as noted by Guitérrez-Rodríguez:

*[T]he correlation between the societal recognition of domestic work and its labor force, commonly racialized and feminized, reveals how labor is not only constituted by its quality, but by its quantifiable character in terms of who does the work. Domestic work is not only badly paid because it is signified as non-productive, but because those doing this work are feminized and racialized subjects considered as "inferior" to the hegemonic normative subject. (Guitérrez-Rodríguez, 2010, p. 15)*

Au pairs are, in short, gendered as well as ethnicised/racialised and classed through the work they carry out. The au pair appears to be an Other, inherently different from the host family who employs her. Yet as long as the reason for her difference is imagined primarily as a global class inequality, it is located outside the realm of the family home or the nation – indeed, elsewhere. Nevertheless, inequalities of the intimate and the global are interwoven in the private household, and produce the home as an affectively loaded sphere. Guitérrez-Rodríguez argues that:

*In the daily life of household work, affects are transmitted and circulated through the energies incorporated, expressed and impressed in a space marked by local and global inequalities. Though affects seem to transcend a material logic of power, they evolve implicitly in this logic. (Guitérrez-Rodríguez, 2010, p. 6)*

Global inequalities seep into domestic work: into the work itself, into the place in which it is carried out and into the relationship between employer and employee. The inequalities between au pair and host family that seem to be an inherent part of au pairing require additional labour on behalf of au pairs, and specifically an affective and emotional handling of loss (Stubberud, 2015).

Au pairs' citizenship and migrant status also intersect in very direct ways in au pairing. Au pairs deal with and negotiate what is, for many, a highly precarious situation with few formal and informal citizenship rights, yet au pairing is often the only viable migration route (Stubberud, forthcoming). Au pairs are thus, to a large extent, reliant on their own social networks in their destination countries. There may, for example, be more available au pairs than there are host families in a destination country, which would mean that au pairs would need help from family or friends already in the country to find a host family (Liversage, Bille, & Jakobsen, 2013, pp. 86–7). Furthermore, the au pair visa comes with a limited set of citizenship rights in Norway, where, for example, the ability to change host families requires the au pair to pay an application fee worth more than two weeks of work. Downward class mobility may also make it harder for au pairs to find work after au pairing. Yet, for many women from the global south, the au pair scheme and marriage migration are the only achievable options for migration to Norway. And while it is technically possible for anyone to study in Norway (as there are currently no tuition fees), to get a student visa, applicants still must provide a bank statement as proof that they can support themselves financially; the current requirement is that applicants have 97,850 NOK available each year (UDI, 2014d). In other words, finding a host family and then creating a social network may be highly important objectives for those who want to stay on in Norway.

For au pairs, formal and informal citizenship are directly tied up with the host family and, by implication, with their work. This leaves little room for genuine negotiation over tasks, hours, spare time, relationships and so on (Stubberud,

forthcoming). Thus, in order to secure formal and informal citizenship in the present as well as the future, au pairs must mould their bodies to fit the space of the host family's house or find people outside the host family who are able to help them (Stubberud, forthcoming). This also goes for au pairs who do not require a visa but who may still lack informal citizenship in the sense that it may be difficult for them to find work, study options, housing and so on, without help from a longer-term resident. Even if migrant and visa statuses do not formally concern all au pairs, au pairing in Norway is still formally constructed as a form of temporary and conditional migration that, in practice, adds to the precariousness of au pairing and limits au pairs' agency. Although there is no doubt that work is the reason why host families employ au pairs, this element must be denied in Norway for the au pair scheme to exist in its current form (Gullikstad & Annfelt, forthcoming). This paradoxical situation also influences the working conditions of au pairs from EU countries.

The notion that au pairs are 'part of the family' – sometimes imagined as a 'sister' or a second 'wife' – combined with the fact that au pairs may use dating as a way to build a network outside the host family, invokes sexuality as a relevant category that intersects with citizenship and migrant status (Stubberud, forthcoming). I would argue that au pairs would not be imaginable as 'part of the family' if they were not women, as this imagining relies on a paternalistic notion that au pairing is somehow a 'safe' way for young women to travel because they are protected by 'family' (Liarou, 2015). Furthermore, the au pair is imaginable as a 'sister', 'daughter' and 'wife' in order to naturalise her ability to do the job and explain the lack of pay. Thus, au pairs are simultaneously constructed as committed careworkers and sexually available and promiscuous women, meaning they must walk a tightrope of expressing just the right amount of femininity (Cox, 2007). In addition, promiscuity and poor education may be parts of the stereotypes that au pairs must negotiate (Hemsing, 2003).

Most of my informants wanted to remain in Norway upon the end of their contracts (Stubberud, forthcoming), and those who needed a visa had limited ways of obtaining this. Family reunification is one of the few achievable methods for au pairs to stay on after their contract. However, au pairs from the EU/Schengen Area countries may also need a loyal ally to help them find other work, and a partner may well fill this role. Stories of dating were important in the interviews, even when the topic was ostensibly on migration plans, rather than personal life. The age of my informants – all of whom were under 33 – is also likely to have contributed to this. Au pairs' (apparent) heterosexuality thus becomes a key factor for them in figuring out ways to stay in Norway. This is visible not only in my informants' stories, but also in what some of them told me about their host families' involvement in their dating. In order for host families to involve themselves in the way in which some of them did – introducing au pairs to single male friends or single colleagues, setting up dating profiles online and 'playfully' policing the au pairs' dating activities – the host families needed to read the au pairs as sexually available. The apparent importance of au pairs' heterosexuality can thus be read in relation to a culturally available fantasy of a colonial sexual relation (Keskinen, 2013).

This sexual availability is also present in the media representations of au pairs; on the one hand, both of the main characters in the films I analyse in the article 'Framing the au pair' have male partners, and, on the other hand, sexual abuse by host fathers is an important part of the construction of au pairs in the film *Herskap og tenarar* (Stubberud, 2015). The au pair is thus imagined as both a possible girlfriend or partner, and as someone who is subject to sexual abuse. I have argued that the image of au pairs as eroticised or sexually available 'exotic' Others serves the purpose of mitigating the unequal power dynamic between au pairs and host families (ibid). Judith Butler notes that:

*these categories [gender and race] always work as background for one another, and they often find their most powerful articulation through one another. Thus,*

*sexualization of racial gender norms calls to be read through multiple lenses at once. (Butler, 1999, p. xvi)*

Sexual harassment is a gendered aspect of the domestic service sector that may contribute to both domestic workers' precarious position in the labour market as well as to their further social exclusion (Gavanas, 2010, p. 53). When the au pairs in the documentaries talk about sexual harassment, this harassment cannot be seen separately to racism (Stubberud, 2015). Yet my focus in the analysis is not the au pairs' stories but their overall representation in the films. This representation becomes problematic precisely at the intersection between race and gender – in the scenes in which the Miss Au Pair beauty pageant is cross-cut with stories of sexual abuse. This is a powerful sequence, but its power comes from the ambiguity of the sexual abuse and harassment that the Miss Au Pair beauty pageant seems to add to the au pairs' stories. In the article, I draw on Bhattacharyya's notion of the exotic (2002) to argue that the unequal power relation between au pairs and their hosts – which in most cases 'only' manifests in abusive working conditions with long hours, extensive task lists and little pay – is eroticised and produced as something desirable through the cross-cutting in *Herskap og tenarar*. Heterosexuality plays a significant part in the construction of au pairs in the documentaries, as this construction relies on aligning sexualisation and racialisation in such a way that the (imagined) Oriental woman is made suitable for the job.

#### **4.4. The home and the nation**

Work carried out in the sphere of the private home takes on meaning that goes well beyond that sphere. The slave reference that has come up a few times in this thesis – for example in the documentary *Kvinne 2013: De gode hjelpere* – shows the way in which the work au pairs do takes on meaning beyond what happens at the site where the work is done. Paid domestic labour carries with it the history of slavery and colonialism that makes it relevant for au pairs to mention slavery

as a viable frame of interpretation when addressing their work situation, as done by the au pair in the documentary. This reference to slavery also carries other connotations to the home, migration regimes, racism and sexism, and the way in which the nation and the domestic sphere of the home melt together and mutually constitute each other (see, e.g., Anderson, 2000; Collins, 1998; Lewis, 2006). Au pairs' race, class, gender, ethnicity, religion, citizenship, sexuality and so on may play a part in these processes of inclusion and exclusion, in the home as well as the nation.

In Norway, as elsewhere, the migrant woman is constituted as that which is 'not Norway', and she is constructed in this way through a range of different categories that come together in specific ways at the site of domestic work in the private home, as discussed above. The domestic worker can be seen to embody boundaries – between private and public, inside and outside. The link between the home and the nation has been firmly established (see, e.g., Collins, 1998; Yuval-Davis, 1993, 1996) and sprang out of a historical change in the middle of the 18th century in the Western world, with an increased focus on a nation-state based on *territory* as well as a *population* in this territory. With this shift, the home and motherhood took on new meaning as spheres in which population policy could be exercised (Solheim, 2007, p. 94, see also Foucault, 2002).

In researching migrant domestic work, the links between the home and the nation become highly visible; in the case of au pairs, the home becomes the physical space in which larger processes of marginalisation, inclusion and exclusion take place. The home is a political space where practices are 'regulated by hidden principles and organised along axes of power', as well as where identities are shaped and reshaped over time (Triandafyllidou & Marchetti, 2015, p. 4). The home is, in other words, not a neutral or necessarily safe place, but a place where a great deal of negotiation is done – negotiation that happens along numerous axes of power, as I have shown above in the case of au pairs. Home is also where the self spills out into physical space in a process of embodiment

(Ahmed, 2006, p. 11). Yet what happens when the home is not one's own? When the self cannot occupy the domestic space, but is rather restricted by the temporality and subordination of residing in the space of *someone else's* home? What happens when migration policy makes the home uninhabitable? Gail Lewis notes that:

*[T]he fate of the figures of the immigrant woman and the actually existing global careworker is to become the symbolic and embodied representatives of what Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Bidy Martin (2003, p. 90) referred to as the modality of 'not-being at home' and thus 'realising that home [is] an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance'. (Lewis, 2006, p. 100)*

The symbolic figure of the immigrant woman appears to be something distinctly different from 'the actually existing global careworker' who may nevertheless share the same fate. Lewis points towards the figure of the migrant woman and the role of the home in producing particular 'imaginaries of Europe', wherein the connection between these imaginaries and the immigrant woman 'lies in the double meaning of the domestic as household (including this as the site of legitimate sexuality) and nation(al), both of which have roots in colonial discourse and practice' (Lewis, 2006, p. 96).

The production of an imagined common European identity that constructs itself as a universal standard relies on the construction of a distinguishable inside and outside, wherein the figure of the immigrant woman embodies 'all that is not Europe' (ibid., p. 89). The categories of gender, ethnicity, race, migrant status and citizenship, sexuality, age and so on all intersect in a larger process of producing not only a particular kind of worker in the home, but also a particular kind of migrant. The home and the nation, collapsed into one, thus become not only the site at which this happens, but also become constituted through the figure of the migrant. In Norwegian public discourse, migrant domestic workers are imagined as almost exclusively female, and are constituted as always already oppressed

(Mohanty, 1988), in the sense that their current economic exploitation is ascribed to their very foreignness – a foreignness that can only be established in relation to an imagined difference from ‘Norwegianness’. In this way, the home and the nation can be established through their exclusion of the history of the migrant woman.

#### **4.5. Concluding remarks**

The intersectionality of labour in the case of au pairs not only involves the various categories that are usually invoked, such as class, gender, race and ethnicity, but also sexuality, religion and migrant status/visa status. Furthermore, the ability, willingness or need to carry out emotional and affective labour – either through carework or through the negotiation of the unexpected loss of social status that au pairing seems to involve, should also be taken into account. The concept of intersectionality has the potential to draw these elements together and see them as interchanging and co-constitutive in producing the au pair. However, it is the situated practice of this particular type of migrant domestic work that provides the framework for the marginalisation of au pairs. By looking at the meanings of the various categories, I have indicated what enters into the practice of au pair work while keeping the focus on au pair work as the structuring principle. I have also drawn attention to the way in which the range of different categories and the ways in which they interact shape the labour and the labouring body. Thus, with ‘intersectionality at work’, I have tried to capture the cultural meanings of cleaning and caring, as well as the mental and physical costs of carrying out such labour. Important here are also the symbolic and concrete links between home and nation, wherein negotiations in the home are symbolic negotiations over the borders of the nation as well as migration policies that specifically shape a migrant domestic worker’s room to negotiate in the (employer’s) home.

In addressing intersectionality at work, I have discussed how work must be taken into account as both a site and an activity in which inequalities take a specific form. I have also shown, through the articles of this thesis as well as in the arguments above, how the working body can, in theory, be anyone, in the sense of being marked by a range of categories. In other words, what is most important is not the individual categories that can be assigned to individual au pairs (i.e. female, white, middle-class), but rather the site of work that acquires meaning through association with certain categories and the hierarchies these categories are part of. When au pairs are imagined to be Filipinas and Filipinas are racialised in particular ways, au pairs are also racialised. Meaning is transferred from the status of the category to the activity, and when the activity gains meaning through associated categories, the activity also makes the associated categories stick to people performing the activity. Yet when this happens, it always takes place in a particular time and place and is shaped by existing social inequalities. By analysing cultural representations, as I do in the article 'Framing the au pair', it is possible to see how subordination is produced and maintained, culturally.

The concept of intersectionality is particularly useful partly because of the place of origin – namely political activism and law. Speaking through categories is troubling as their point of reference is highly unclear, and I have no desire to secure the meaning of 'gender', for example. Yet it still seems to me that it is necessary to do so, at least to some extent, when addressing processes of marginalisation, because we need words that carry some sort of political meaning to describe whatever processes of marginalisation are happening in a specific site. When I draw on the concept of intersectionality, it is partly because the categories I refer to retain some of their political weight due to intersectionality's roots in political activism and law. It is also partly because, inherent in the concept, there is the presumption that no one category can be isolated from the others, but each interacts with and is produced alongside other categories; in other words, what, for example, 'gender' is or means is an empirical question that

must be analysed in each context, with attention to other possible categories that may intersect with the situated production and meanings of gender. At the same time, gender, to stay with the example, is part of a larger (geographical/ideological) system of symbolic references that give it political meaning.

In drawing on commonly used categories such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, religion and sexuality, I have tried to show how a certain type of worker is produced and maintained through representations that feed into this larger system of symbolic meaning, and how these representations legitimise continued subordination. Race, ethnicity and gender intersect in the au pair scheme and produce a worker that is imagined to have cleaning and caring capacities that all women are presumed to have. At the same time, her foreignness is 'othered' through a process of racialisation and ethnicisation that intersects with class, producing a female worker who accepts cleaning and caring tasks under very poor working conditions that, most notably, lack proper pay. The way in which these categories intersect contributes to producing migrants in a precarious situation, who, in Norway as well as in many other places, must deal with a strict migration regime. Within this migration regime, and within the homes of the host families, au pairs' religion may add to their possible imagining as persons who belong or persons who do not belong. Heterosexuality may also play a part, not only as a possible route to citizenship but also as part of the fantasy of au pairs and the eroticisation of unequal power hierarchies that I discuss in the third article of this thesis.

In discussing the way in which au pairs are constructed as a particular type of (non-)worker through looking at the ways in which the aforementioned categories intersect, I have hoped to produce knowledge that is both situated and political. The discussion above relates to a larger question – not of au pairing, per se, but of what au pairing does to the bodies that work in the home and, by

extension, what marginalised labour does to the labourers, as well as what effect it has in the wider society.

In the following part, I turn the focus towards methodology and the particular path that the research questions I asked in the beginning led to. Moving from the levels of lived knowledge of working in the domestic sphere and the meaning of transnational migration, to representations and cultural meanings of domestic work and carework, led to a complex approach to methodology that I map out in the following pages.

## **5. The site of au pairing and mixed and messy methods**

When I started working on this thesis I was interested in exploring a number of aspects connected to au pairing: work, intimacy, motivations for au pairing and migration, negotiations in the household and relationships. I was interested in the stories au pairs might tell me about these things, and how these stories feature as aspects of 'everyday culture' in their own right, as well as how they accumulate into larger cultural practices and narratives. This work is situated within the field of feminist and cultural studies, where analysis and critique of everyday cultures is central. Ann Gray defines the cultures of everyday life as the 'meanings, processes and artefacts of culture [that] are produced, distributed and consumed within particular material circumstances. In other words, texts and practices are both product of and constitutive of the social world' (Gray, 2003, p. 12).

Within this particular frame, the au pair scheme can be seen as both a cultural artefact that can be studied in its own right as well as a lens through which a broader cultural practice can be critically examined. Furthermore, the kinds of questions I ask in this thesis fall into a cultural studies tradition of exploring the way in which practices relate to identity, a sense of self, social relations and power (ibid., p. 16). In this part, I flesh out my process of data gathering. As Figure 2 shows, my core material consists of in-depth interviews, participant observation and film analysis. In what follows, I go through my reasons for choosing this material, the various obstacles I met along the way and the way in which I carried out what could be called close and critical readings of a range of empirical material, in dialogue with theory.

<p><b>Core data material:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-depth interviews with 15 current and former au pairs</li> <li>• Participant observation with two au pairs in the homes of the host families</li> <li>• Analysis of two Norwegian au pair documentaries</li> </ul> <p><b>Support material:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of text and images of au pair agency websites</li> <li>• Analysis of text and images of au pair profiles on agency websites</li> <li>• Conversations with employees at the Au Pair Centre in Oslo and an au pair agency</li> <li>• Analysis of media coverage of au pairs</li> <li>• Fiction films and books on domestic workers</li> </ul>
---

My interdisciplinary background in feminist/gender and cultural studies located me in a tradition that is somewhat famous for its methodological diversity (Barker, 2012; Gray, 2003; Pickering, 2008) and – in relation to feminist/gender studies – for challenging conventional research methods (Buikema, Griffin, & Lykke, 2011). Furthermore, the concern of these disciplines lies not so much with the ‘technicalities of method but with the philosophical approaches that underpin them; that is, methodology’ (Barker, 2012, p. 32). Given my own background, with an undergraduate degree in

combined studies (including film studies, social anthropology, sociology,

Figure 2

history of science, philosophy and literature) and a master’s degree in interdisciplinary gender studies, the flexible, pragmatic, critical and diverse methods and methodologies of cultural and feminist/gender studies suited me well. My selection of material and mixed methods meant that the strength of one method could overcome the weaknesses of the others and thus provide richer data material (Pickering, 2008, p. 4). When exploring the complexities of social and cultural processes, meanings and practices, questions of methods cannot be solved in advance, but must be adapted throughout the process (Gray, 2003, p. 5). Furthermore, I find the lack of distinction between methods and methodology fruitful, and do not operate with any such clear distinction here.

The methods researchers actively chose, or intuitively decide on, are the result of the questions they ask and the process of asking these questions. Culture and gender studies have their own methodological and epistemological practices that influence both research questions and research practices. Intuition is defined by Lauren Berlant as ‘the process of dynamic sensual data-gathering through which affect takes shape in forms whose job it is to make reliable sense of life’ and ‘where affect meets history, in all of its chaos, normative ideology, and embodied practices of discipline and invention’ (Berlant, 2011, p. 52). In the interviews with my informants, I was as concerned with their displays of emotion (or lack thereof) and their body language as I was with the words they used to describe their experiences. Furthermore, in the analysis, the way in which some narratives appeared to be legitimate ways of framing a story was as important to me as the content of the narratives. Similarly, in analysing the documentaries I was as concerned with the circulation of the image of ‘The Au Pair’ as I was with the specificities and technicalities of the films. All of this impacted on the production of knowledge. My acknowledgement of intuition – both in the interview process and in the analysis – allowed me to remain open to the fact that I did not always trust my questions to be the right ones, and to the possibility of finding knowledge elsewhere and in other ways than expected prior to the encounter with whatever empirical material I was engaging with.

I chose a methodology that I call a messy, multi-sited, multi-method approach. By this I mean quite literally learning in different places, using different methods, in order to produce partial and situated knowledges that ‘leave opportunities to learn from other perspectives and ways of knowing, to engage in translation exercises across non-reducible knowledges’ (Pratt, 2004, p. 179; see also Haraway, 1988). It could also be seen as a form of feminist ethnography, leaning on Beverly Skeggs’s definition of ethnography as ‘theory of the research process – an idea about how we should do research’, which usually involves working across time and space, within the setting of participants, and with the researcher involved as

a participant (2000, p. 426). Skeggs furthermore points to the way in which cultural studies has 'generated a form of ethnography which pays close attention not only to experience in context, but also to the ways in which representations shape the lived context' (Skeggs, 2000, p. 428). Working at the intersection between gender studies and cultural studies was my ambition at the outset of this thesis, and resulted in the messy, multi-sited, multi-method approach combining interviews, participant observation, film analysis and website analysis. In the following, I go through the process of deciding where to learn, finding sources, recruiting informants and interviewing and doing participant observation, as well as my strategies for analysing films and websites.

### **5.1. Where to start learning?**

The material in this thesis consists of interviews with current and former au pairs, documentary films, participant observations and agency websites and au pairs' profiles on these websites. In addition, my understanding of au pairing rests on: informal chats with various stakeholders, who provided me with information that I used in the articles; daily newspaper articles on au pairs, as well as more organised searches of news articles, which gave me an overall impression of the media coverage of this topic; and fiction books and films<sup>10</sup> about au pairs and domestic workers, which embedded the topic under my skin.<sup>11</sup> While interviews were always intended as my primary data source, they proved more complicated than originally planned, as recruitment turned out to be challenging.

---

<sup>10</sup> I would like to mention the film *Ilo Ilo* (Chen, 2013) as a particularly powerful depiction of a Filipina live-in domestic worker in Singapore and her employers.

<sup>11</sup> There is no doubt that this sprang out of a desire for a type of embodied knowledge. I have not been an au pair, nor have I migrated as a worker, and although I have lived for longer periods in countries other than Norway, and had had a few low-pay and low-status jobs cleaning hotel rooms and working in a supermarket in Norway, I do not think these jobs nor made me capable of appreciating the realities of live-in domestic work.

## **5.2. Looking in other places**

I engaged in website analysis when I had not yet begun my interviews and was struggling to find informants. Keen to learn, I decided to spend some time analysing au pair websites and au pair profiles on these websites in order to better grasp the different actors in the au pair scheme, the kind of language used by these actors and the methods used by au pairs and host families to reach each other.

Au pairs use these websites to register profiles with their picture and general information (name, gender, age, home country, preferences regarding the host family, etc.), and post a letter to their future host family that describes their experiences, education, motivation, family life in the home country, hobbies, interests and special skills. Generally, this information is accessible to anyone, whether or not they are registered on the site, but contact information is only visible to registered users. My interest in the websites concerned the way in which they mediated contact between the au pairs and the host families, and the strategies used by the au pairs on these sites to present themselves in a way that would attract Norwegian families. My analysis of this was presented as a conference paper at the Gender, Work and Organization conference in Keele in June 2012 (Stubberud, 2012b).

Throughout the process, I also kept an eye on news coverage of au pairs in Norway. Legislative changes have been debated to some extent, and the court trials in cases in which au pairs have been abused by the host families have been covered by the press. I did not analyse this media coverage beyond the two documentaries, but rather used the news stories in a similar way to the au pair statistics – as background information and a way of contextualising my research. Most importantly, following the news as well as immersing myself in other kinds of cultural products related to au pairing, such as films and books, allowed me to continue learning and thinking, even when recruitment was slow.

### **5.3. Finding informants for qualitative interviews**

Qualitative interviews allowed me to gain the type of knowledge I was hoping for: intimate knowledge of au pairs' daily lives from the au pairs' point of view, and detailed knowledge of their motivation for au pairing, their work, their future plans, their thoughts and feelings connected to their work, their conceptualisations of the work and the migration process, and their sense of agency. Qualitative, loosely structured interviews were thought to be a potentially good way of acquiring the type of data needed to address these questions. It would have been possible to find out some of this information in other ways, but this may have meant reaching more informants – for example through an online survey. It was more important to me to understand how au pairs conceptualise their own work than to know the exact number of hours they work, to give one example. Thus, given the kinds of questions I ask in this thesis, I never really considered learning from the au pairs, themselves, in any other way.

I planned numerous strategies for finding informants: snowballing, using my own networks and advertising my project on online discussion forums, at Norwegian courses and schools, at international student's organisations and in kindergartens where au pairs would be likely to drop off and pick up the host family's children. I also planned to ask agencies and other stakeholders for help. In the end, I used most of these methods, yet ended up with only 15 informants, despite my aim of interviewing 20. There are numerous reasons why the recruitment process was slower and harder than I had imagined.

One of these reasons had to do with my research design. I was not prepared to only interview Filipina au pairs, but, rather, wanted to speak to women and also men from a wide range of countries. This sprang out of a concern, from the beginning, with essentialising au pairs as Filipinas, and vice versa. I was also keen to speak with au pairs in many different places in Norway. I believe that geography can play an important part in the way in which the au pair experience

plays out, as living in the countryside or in a smaller village might make people more prone to loneliness and isolation. This also means that, for example, the forms of agency that I describe in this thesis do not include political agency, as community organising would not have been an accessible option for many of my informants.

All this means that, firstly, I could not simply go to the Filipino associations in the various Norwegian cities and recruit informants there, nor could I hang out in the big parks in the western parts of Oslo and wait for brown women with white children. Also, communities of au pairs from nations other than the Philippines are not necessarily as well organised, as they are fewer in number; thus, there were no clear-cut organisations to approach. Furthermore, it is not a given that au pairs would have become involved in these organisations during their stay abroad. Secondly, I could only use my informants' existing social networks to a limited extent, as the au pairs they knew (if they knew any at all) tended to live and work in the same area. Thirdly, I was unprepared for the fact that au pairs who are not living in cities or do not belong to a religious or national ex-pat community often have a very limited social network. This seemed to be the situation for most of my informants.

Another issue worth mentioning regarding the recruitment process is the resistance I met when trying to recruit through my own networks. As I am white, middle-class and do not have children (and thus do not have access to, for example, kindergartens), my network of family and friends usually put me in touch with host families who had au pairs, rather than au pairs, themselves. With few exceptions, host families declined my requests to talk to their au pair; some did not reply to my e-mails or return my phone calls, and others simply denied having an au pair. Guro K. Kristensen and Malin N. Ravn (forthcoming) have pointed to the fact that little methodology literature addresses the issue of recruitment. They describe 'reluctant gatekeepers' as, for example, leaders at institutions who must give their permission for the researcher's presence, and

some of the host families I spoke to could be seen in a similar way – as gatekeepers to their au pairs. The research topic was no doubt perceived as sensitive by the host families I contacted, and they were no doubt aware that they would also have no control over what was being communicated through their au pairs.

Once I actually got in touch with au pairs, only one interview did not take place, while the rest were arranged and carried out as planned. No informants withdrew from the project. I carried out the final interview in July 2013, almost two years after beginning the project. While struggling to recruit, I spent time doing website analysis and watching films – among a number of other things – in an attempt to learn, and I also engaged in a follow-up interview with one informant. The au pairs I interviewed came from a range of countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. All of the interviewees were: a) au pairs; b) women who had recently been working as au pairs but now held other visa categories; or c) European women who had recently been working as au pairs and who stayed in Norway without needing a visa. The women lived in seven different locations in Norway, including both large and small cities and rural areas. Two interviews were done over the phone and another was conducted over Skype with video; the others were done in the areas in which the au pairs lived – usually in public places, but in some instances also in the homes of the host families. I now turn to the processes of interviewing and combining interviews with participant observation.

#### **5.4. Loosely structured interaction and attention to affect**

The themes for my research guide were formed by my interests in labour, intimacy in the domestic sphere and the process of migrating and choosing au pairing as the structuring principle for the movement from one country to another. I was also interested in what Stine H. Bang Svendsen (2014) calls ‘affective inquiry’, which involves attention to changes in voice or body language

during the interview, explicit displays of emotion or repeated use of certain words or phrases that allude to specific affective states. Some of the topics listed above were not necessarily easy to speak directly about, such as the topic of negotiating one's own fall in social status. This meant that the use of affective inquiry as an explicit tool allowed me to understand more of my informants' situations.

In order to do this, I had to be particularly attentive throughout the interviews. Immediately after each interview, I would write down a range of my own observations and thoughts connected to the interview in a manner that might be more common in ethnographic fieldwork – and which I also used during my very brief engagement in participant observation. These observations generally involved my own feelings in the situation, as well as my informants' expressions of emotion throughout the interviews. In addition to helping me remember when I listened to the sound files later on, these notes also helped me deal with the feeling of being overwhelmed by the non-discursive elements of the interview that added to the rich stories my informants told me.

The interviews were loosely structured and lasted between one and three hours. In the first couple of interviews, I had a very detailed guide that I soon replaced with a much shorter one. Although the long guide was useful in terms of my own thinking about the kinds of things I wanted to learn, the shorter guide made me less concerned with my own ideas and more focused on the interaction between myself and the informant. Interviews, as Tim Rapley puts it, are 'social encounters where speakers collaborate in producing retrospective (or prospective) accounts or versions of their past (or future) actions, experiences, feelings and thoughts' (Rapley, 2004, p. 16). I thus wanted to remain as open as possible to whatever co-production of knowledge the interview encounter might generate, as well as to stay open to the fact that I would not necessarily know the kinds of things my informants would teach me, and thus which questions to ask. In this sense, the shorter guide was more helpful, yet I missed my list of questions in instances when the informant was less talkative.

There are many immediate and not so immediate similarities and differences between researchers and informants that may play into an interview setting: gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, education level, language proficiency, religion, citizenship and visa status, political views and so on. As a white, middle-class, highly educated queer woman in my late 20s, I was similar to my informants in many ways – most notably age, but I also had a similar education level and class background to many of them. However, there were also differences that were particularly important during the interview and that strengthened the already skewed power relation of the interview setting (Gunaratnam, 2003).

For example, language proficiency seemed to be a source of stress for some of my informants, who would actively apologise for what they perceived to be poor English skills. Others did not seem fazed by this at all. Although most of the interviews were done in English, which is my second language, my British accent could have been off-putting to some, and some of my informants might have found me easier to understand had I had spoken 'broken English'. A few wanted to conduct the interview in Norwegian and saw it as language practice. Language could be seen as a dimension that, along with gender, race and ethnicity, sexuality, age and class, plays a part in marginalisation (Lutz et al., 2011, p. 6). This goes for the interview setting, as well as the possible marginalising effects languages, or lack of language skills, could have in the everyday lives of my informants – which were then re-enacted in the interview setting. Yet it is hard to decipher exactly which categories of similarities and differences will be important in an interview, and to plan and prepare accordingly. One of the things that is possible to plan, however, is location, even if the meaning of different locations is not always straightforward.

### **5.5. The importance of location**

The location of the interview was largely determined by what was most convenient for my informants. I interviewed in cafes, at the host family's home, at the informant's friend's house, over the phone and Skype, and in my office. This range of contexts was pragmatic, as my informants were often very busy, not able to leave the house in a manner that would not raise suspicion, not able to meet me in public, not able (or willing) to tell their host families that they were being interviewed and so on. While it was clear that the location of the interview highly influenced the way the interview felt to me, I do not think what locations mean is given in every instance.

Yasmin Gunaratnam (2003) writes about the way in which different spaces produce different types of interaction. She refers to an interview with an older black man in his home, where he – despite the apparent safety in the sense that there was no chance of others overhearing or interrupting what was being said – withheld information that he had disclosed earlier in a public setting. The reason for this, she argues, is that her role as an interviewer in this more formal setting became much clearer, and this perhaps made the man feel less safe speaking to her. Furthermore, Gunaratnam argues that the impossibility of interruption or distraction may have actually inhibited his willingness to speak (Gunaratnam, 2003, pp. 172-4). I believe this story sheds light on why I felt some of my interviews went smoother, with more of a natural flow of conversation, as opposed to others, in which I used the interview guides more actively without being certain that the questions were in fact the right ones to ask in the particular situation.

I felt most happy and relaxed during the interviews in cafes. In this context, the informant and I appeared to be two friends meeting over coffee. The setting was most likely as familiar to the informant as it was to myself – at least that was the feeling I got during most of these interviews – which contributed to a relaxed and

informal atmosphere. In cafes, however, whenever the topic circled around sensitive issues, I was worried about people overhearing our conversations. This was not an issue during the interviews done in my informants' temporary homes; these interviews felt incredibly rich to me – although this might have been as much due to my own multi-sensory experience of being present in the informant's life in a different way, as about her willingness to teach me about herself and her life. Nevertheless, spaces of dwelling are value-laden, and I think this contributed to what I felt were very dense interviews with rich narratives, interruptions from family members, my own notes describing the interior of the house and the informant lowering her voice when talking about sensitive issues. On the other hand, the interviews carried out in my office were those that were perhaps most affected by the physical surroundings. In my office, I was clearly on home turf, and the power hierarchy between myself and the informant (which seemed to surface less in the other settings) was, in hindsight, evident; at least, this seems to be a likely interpretation for what I felt at the time were slow interviews, in which the informant was not speaking freely. This did not apply to interviews carried out over Skype or the phone. In these cases, I did not feel as connected to the informant as I often did in the other interviews and could not as easily judge the information I was given; but, in both cases, the informants and I had what I considered an open conversation.

#### **5.6. Subject positions, sensitive issues and coherent stories**

When I started interviewing I had not reflected on the au pairs' self-identification as au pairs. This selection criterion appeared obvious, but it slowly dawned on me that framing the interview and my project so clearly to be about au pairs – for example by stating this in the letters I sent out with information about my project and about participation – might not necessarily have been helpful. As I indicate, especially in the last article of this thesis (Stubberud, 2015), the 'au pair' label is far from neutral. It is possible that by framing the interview in terms of me as a researcher interviewing an au pair about her experiences, I not only

framed the au pair's stories in certain terms that she may or may not have agreed with, but I also gave her a specific, ethnicised, gendered and indeed marginalised position to speak from. Yet I was unaware of these specific problems at the outset of my project, and also of how the au pair label was not, in fact, a description of a specific migration route but a label that attempts to create what it is supposed to describe.

Interviewing based on my identification of informants *as* au pairs might have affected the way in which I felt the sometimes sensitive issues we touched upon. Whether or not an issue feels sensitive is highly contextual. While some informants hesitated, lowered their voice, twisted in their chairs or cried when talking about certain issues, others spoke unflinchingly and confidently about the same kinds of things – for example problems related to meals, use of space in the household, relationships to the host family and others, or specific incidents such as being fired or escaping from the host family. As Gunaratnam points out, 'what people tell us or show us, or do not tell us or show us, is sensitive to the psycho-social organization, structuring and physical context of research relations' (Gunaratnam, 2003, p. 163).

Furthermore, the way in which I dealt with these issues both in the interview setting and in the analysis afterwards was connected to my overall methodology. That is, I used a multi-sited, multi-method approach that aimed to take in the mess and inherent uncertainty in empirical research in an attempt to acknowledge that categories that are activated in various ways in the interview setting, such as race, gender or class, do not 'operate in singular, neat, coherent, and visible ways' (Gunaratnam, 2003, p. 195). I was also aware of what Margaretha Järvinen (2000) calls the 'biographical illusion', in which narrations of life histories presume a sense of order that is not present in people's lives. The extension of this presumption is that the researcher might be positively biased towards informants who are better at following culturally specific narrative patterns. Researchers must particularly bear this in mind when interviewing

informants with a range of cultural backgrounds and communication skills (which are sometimes separate from language skills).

### **5.7. Embodied knowledge**

Shortly after I began work on the interview guide, the issue of which questions I should ask provoked the thought that the world of au pairs might be so different from my own that I would not be able to ask the right questions and would learn only partially by talking to them. I therefore decided that, when possible, I would also ask to spend a day with the au pair where she lived and worked. The idea was that, by doing this, I would not only get to know the au pair in question better, but I would also gain embodied and multi-sensual knowledge of her situation (Frosh, 2007; Anim-Addo and Gunaratnam 2012). However, as I started recruiting, I discovered the already mentioned issue of suspicious host families, which limited my engagement in participant observation to only two informants.

The time I spent with these two informants, however, was very rewarding in a number of ways. I am not a trained anthropologist, and I do not know how researchers typically feel after spending a day with an informant and host family. However, after both observations, I arrived home at night feeling completely exhausted, like I was overloaded with direct, unmediated knowledge that would require a significant amount of time to process. John Law (2004) discusses the phenomenon of feeling overwhelmed by reality when doing research while simultaneously feeling as if nothing is going on, and this describes much of what I felt at the time. Situations unfolded that I might not have appreciated the full extent of in an interview – for example tense communication between an au pair and host mum; the labour of being responsible for small children during dinner time when the children are screaming and do not want to sit still and eat, which means that the au pair does not eat either until the children have left the table and her food has become cold; and the embodied knowledge of exactly how fluid the boundary between work and spare time can be, as the sound of the children's

running and host parents' talk reaches the au pair's room. While many of my informants talked about these issues, I was able to relate to them quite differently after observing them.

Participant observation is by no means representative of the actual experiences of au pairs, yet it nevertheless provides qualitatively different information from that produced in interviews. I also believe it created more of a common ground that made the interviews easier, as I was able to ask questions that were more sensitive to nuances in the stories presented to me. I also have a feeling that it was easier for my informants to talk to me about their experiences when I was evidently more in the know about what went on in the house. Following Sarah Pink, participant observation is for me 'framed with ideas of learning as embodied, emplaced, sensorial and empathetic, rather than occurring simply through a mix of participation and observation' (Pink, 2009, p. 63). This is not to say that I got to know the au pairs I visited, but rather that the knowledge I gained about their situations was embodied and physical for me, and it is probably not coincidence that I spent a lot of time thinking about and working through both of these interviews as the feeling of learning for me was tangibly different from that of the other interviews.

As already mentioned, I wrote notes immediately after interviewing and I did the same both during and after participant observation. In addition to writing about affect, I also wrote down details about where we met, how I felt about our interaction, what the au pair looked like and what the house or the place in which we did the interview looked, smelled and felt like. I also took notes of what we talked about in the interview, if there was something particular that struck me and if we were interrupted, if there was a noise and so on. These notes were important to me, considering that I was very tuned in to the affective aspects of interviewing. As Pink (2009) argues, interviews are not just talk, and the line between interviews and participant observation is not always clear. What I aimed to do in writing these logs was to bring to the fore intuitive and bodily learning

based on the sum of all senses put to work at the same time – all somehow significant for the interaction between myself and the informants, and my understanding of this interaction.

### **5.8. The darling's in the details**

Before I started interviewing, transcribing and analysing the interviews, I had not really reflected on the ways in which most researchers represent their interview material in snippets when writing about it – drawing out a sentence or two, which they analyse. When I started writing based on my interview material and participant observation, I quickly found that I simply could not do this. I kept hearing my informants' voices through the transcriptions, seeing their body language and remembering the complexity and 'wholeness' of their stories. I could not separate what they had told me about their work, for example, from their reason for migrating. This meant that even though I worked across the interviews, synthesising them and copying and pasting according to themes, each individual informant kept a presence in my mind and writing that I had not expected.

The solution was to represent a very small number of the interviews in the articles that follow. In this way, I was able to retain more of the complexity in informants' stories, as the richness lies in the details and, in order for the details to remain rich, I had to include a lot of them. At the same time, I wanted to emphasise that I learned from all the interviews, and all of the voices of the au pairs I talked to are present in this work. I could not have made the arguments I make in the articles of this thesis without the broad and nuanced knowledge my informants provided me with, and this is also the case for the entirety of the previous part, 'Intersectionality at work' (p. 65). In cases in which I focus on a particular informant, this is generally because the informant articulated an argument, thought or opinion that many of my informants shared, in a compelling or synthesised manner.

I nevertheless still found that representing my informants through text was a fundamentally troubling practice, as I found acquiring what appeared to be necessary distance to border on the unethical. The kinds of questions one asks produce this situation (which I could also have called a problem, although I do not consider it such); I was interested in a type of knowledge that required real life experiences conveyed by real people, and attempting to reduce these experiences to single line quotes simply would not have allowed me to answer the kinds of questions I was asking.

### **5.9. Film analysis**

The last article of this thesis, 'Framing the au pair', is based on film analysis. I had already seen one of the documentaries, *Mammaranet*, early in the project, but when *Herskap og tenarar* was televised in 2013, I realised that I had to write something about the way in which au pairs were constructed and represented in the public sphere. The reason for this was partly to broaden the picture that my informants had already painted and partly to flesh out the background against which they were living their lives, where the figure of the au pair and the idea of au pairing circulate culturally. In a sense, my analysis of representations also tied in with and drew on my engagement with other types of material through the project, such as websites, media articles and fiction films and books.

There are numerous reasons for my analysis of films. My own background in film studies is one such reason, but a more important one was my interest in representations and how and what representations mean for something becoming thinkable, sayable and doable. In relation to the documentaries, I was curious as to why they seemingly did not represent, for example, the ambivalence I saw in the interview material, and in many of my informants' lives, about conceptualising au pairing as work, migration, serving, cultural exchange and so on. The films, instead, were clear in their portrayal of au pairs as Filipina women who come to work and are frequently abused. As Rosemarie Buikema and Marta

Zarzycka argue about representations of women in the media, ‘we need ... to cut through the proliferating representations of women in art and the media and to realise that the universal character they assume frequently makes us relapse into forms of essentialism and homogeneity’; they argue for the need for critical visual analysis (Buikema & Zarzycka, 2011). This need was also, in a sense, confirmed through several of my informants’ explicit discomfort connected to the public image of au pairs. The public image of au pairs gave them a frame of interpretation for their own lives that did not fit and did not help their situation, and they struggled to rectify it.

Berit Moltu (2004, p. 250) argues that art and creative expressions are forms of knowledge production wherein we do not quite know *what* knowledge is produced, because it is partly hidden in the author(s) and partly in the audience. By analysing cultural expressions – and here I include documentaries – we might discern some of what makes up the fantasies and the subconscious, what amuses or disturbs, and what creates other affects that are partly or not at all within our control. Cultural expressions such as film simply have a different texture than, for example, interviews, and they grasp another sphere of reality, even if the stories told might, on the surface, look the same as the stories circulated and told elsewhere. Yet the conscious construction of specific narratives, produced with specific audiences in mind, simply mean something else.

### **5.10. Analysis and representation**

In practical terms, I dealt with the different kinds of material in much the same way. I watched, listened and read, rewatched, relistened and reread, transcribed and systematised according to various themes or categories, then watched, listened and read again. Parts of the films were transcribed, and so were all the interviews – some by me and some by others, according to my instructions. I kept hesitations, pauses, ‘um’s and ‘eh’s, as well as clear signs of emotion in the transcriptions, but changed quotes into (more) correct English where, for

example, sentence structure made the meaning unclear. My relatively small number of informants and films enabled me to go deep into each story; yet it also provided some challenges in terms of anonymity. Norway is a small country with relatively few au pairs. I thus decided not to disclose any information about my informants except for the general area of the continent they had travelled from, whether they lived in a small or a large place in Norway (where this was relevant) and their approximate age. I also sometimes changed details about the families for whom they worked. Their pseudonyms were chosen from online lists of common names from their respective regions of the world.

A positive aspect of the small number of informants is that it enabled me to work through the material manually. In a sense, this allowed me to carry the story of each informant with me as I pulled out smaller excerpts of the interviews to use in the articles. Furthermore, being able to analyse each story in depth also provided me with the luxury of not having to determine the topics of the articles of this thesis in advance, but rather to go deep into the interview material and decide, across the material, which topics, stories or moments carried most intensity, appeared most important to the informants or surfaced most frequently.

I felt, on numerous occasions during the analysis of the interview material, that this process required distance – distance from the material as well as from the informants who shared with me a moment of their lives as well as their stories. I found this seemingly required distance – or rather what I perceived as distance – troubling. In carrying out the analysis, I found that my informants were so vivid in my memory that it felt at best artificial and at worst unethical to be sitting at my desk considering the meanings of our conversations without them physically present and able to converse with me. In other words, in doing the analysis (where analysis means trying to unpack some of the numerous possibilities of meanings in what my informants were trying to tell me as well as the co-production of meanings in the interviews), I both struggled with and benefitted

from a sense of mental proximity to the people behind the transcriptions. This proximity to the 'informant'/'researched' is described very well by Avtar Brah:

*Knowing is not so much about the assemblage of existing knowledge as it is about recognizing our constitution as 'ourselves' within the fragments that we process as knowledge; 'hailing' and being 'hailed' within the discourses that produce us and the narratives we spin; directing our socially, culturally, psychically, and spiritually marked focus of attention upon that which we appropriate as 'data' or 'evidence'. Hence, 'data' are neither more nor less reliable simply because of the nature of their source: whether the source in question is autobiography, biography, history, religion, or science. (Brah, 1999, pp. 5-6)*

In short, I felt as if I was continuing a conversation, but with my conversation partner missing. This dilemma is not new within feminist research, and is eloquently addressed by, for example, Patti Lather (2007). I certainly have no hope of solving feminist ethical and representational dilemmas here, but merely aim to acknowledge some of the discomfort, feelings of shortcoming and indeed insecurities that were part of the process. I find Gunaratnam's words about learning from different sites and (re)producing and (re)presenting complex knowledge comforting, as they incorporate some of the insecurities and uncertainties that are part of empirical research:

*experimentation and uncertainty ... are part and parcel of the experience of pursuing genealogies of social and cultural phenomena across experiences, meaning frameworks and spaces. The idea that uncertainty is methodologically valuable may provide some comfort to those of us who are struggling with some of the dilemmas, challenges, contradictions and difficulties of researching 'race' and ethnicity. (Gunaratnam, 2003, p. 195)*

John Law and Annemarie Mol make suggestions for maintaining uncertainty and mess in research: 'to list rather than classify; to tell about cases rather than present illustrative representatives; to walk and tell stories about this rather than

seek to make maps' (Law & Mol, 2002, p. 17). I am not certain if I succeeded in this, but it is what I aimed for.

Yet academic writing is not only about how one thinks about learning and communicating knowledge, but also about making the form of presentation fit with certain scholarly standards. Also, the fact that this was a three-year project affected what I was able to do and not do. The thesis takes the shape of an article dissertation, which is directly related to the short timeframe as well as to the fact that two of these articles were written for anthologies. The methodological restrictions of publishing in books and articles that generally seem present mean that I did not really contemplate writing experimentally. More experimental writing could have included audio files or visual material co-produced with my informants; alternatively, it could have involved some sort of biographical account of my informants, which would have enabled the reader to see more of the positions from which they spoke from. Yet, as argued by Mary Fonow and Judith Cook, the 'crisis in representation' has led to a greater variety in the way in which academics represent their findings and think about methods, and refers to Lather (2001), who claims that 'we cannot solve the crisis but only trouble any claims to accurate representation' (Fonow & Cook, 2005, p. 2222). This is what I hoped to do with my emphasis on a messy, multi-sited, multi-method approach.

## 6. Conclusion

The three articles of this thesis investigate domestic labour and affective boundary work, migration and citizenship and the cultural representation and cultural conditions of au pairing. They each revolve around and investigate aspects of the au pair scheme. This is actually not a given: the articles, as well as previous literature on au pairs, clearly demonstrate that 'au pairing' is a black box that may refer to numerous arrangements; it is not, for example, simply a clear-cut visa category. While au pairing sometimes refers to a visa category, it may also be an informal agreement between two parties regarding some form of live-in domestic work and/or childcare (which is sometimes arranged by a third party with or without financial interests), or it may be a migration route, a gap year or merely flexible and affordable domestic work. Despite, or perhaps partly because of, these ambiguities, the label of 'au pairing' serves as an organising principle for this thesis. Part of what I have tried to do is to define what au pairing actually is at this particular time and place.

In the introductory chapter as well as in the articles of this thesis, I cover a number of aspects that play a part in shaping what au pairing is. In this conclusion, I discuss the overall argument of this thesis. In doing so, I return to the main findings of the three articles and discuss these in dialogue with the research questions: How is au pairing understood by au pairs? How are au pairing and the figure of the au pair produced in Norwegian media representations? How is au pairing constituted simultaneously as work and non-work? What forms does agency take for au pairs? And finally, which processes of marginalisation, inclusion and exclusion become active in producing au pairing and the figure of the au pair? I also return to the questions from the umbrella project (see part 1.1., 'Why au pair research?') and discuss these in relation to the overarching issues of gender equality, home and nation. Towards the end of this part, I look at possible

'solutions' for the au pair scheme – given that there is something that needs resolving.

### **6.1. The many practices of au pairing**

The articles in this thesis shed light on the organising principle and definition of 'au pairing', as well as on wider issues connected to domestic labour and the gendering and ethnicisation of labour, migration and migration routes and strategies, and cultural conditions that produce or encourage some narratives, acts and understandings over others. In the thesis, I move between this social level – the lived realities of my informants in their day-to-day lives with the host families – and cultural representations of au pairs. Through interviews, participant observations and film analysis, I discuss the way in which culturally circulated 'truths' and preconceptions of au pairing affect au pairs in their daily lives, and the way in which au pairs deal with and negotiate their situation. To direct my research, I carried out in-depth interviews with current and former au pairs as well as participant observation where this was possible, and I made a conscious effort to recruit informants from around the world, living in different parts of Norway. This means that I spoke to informants who were relatively hard to reach and who presented knowledge about the au pair scheme that may have been slightly different from the knowledge held by Filipina au pairs in the urban areas of Norway. Thus, when I asked the questions 'How is au pairing understood by au pairs?' or 'What forms does agency take for au pairs?', informants' answers broadened the existing knowledge of au pairs in Norway because their voices came from different places than those usually researched. These voices were contextualised by the film analysis as well as the other supplementing material I drew on, such as au pair agency websites, au pairs' online profiles and newspaper articles, in order to produce highly complex knowledge of au pairing as it is currently practiced in Norway.

Interviews and participant observation were effective ways to gain insight into the way in which au pairs understood their own situation, their labour, their agency and their strategies for labour negotiations, as I discuss in the methodology part of this thesis. Yet documentary analysis allowed for a different perspective on the social backdrop – the context – in which au pairing took place for my informants. Against this backdrop and the fantasy figure of the au pair that existed within it, my informants had to negotiate their place in the host families and in society, in general. This culturally circulated figure may have also shed light on the stories my informants decided to share in the interviews. The supplementary film analysis allowed me to address a wider range of questions regarding the cultural meanings of au pairing in Norway. Through my analysis of the documentaries, as presented in the article ‘Framing the au pair’, I was not only able to show how au pairs are represented in the media as victims of sexual abuse, labour exploitation and trafficking, but also to argue that the documentaries frame au pairs by drawing on global care chains and an Orientalist notion of Asian women. Furthermore, the fact that the films only depict Filipina au pairs highlights the highly gendered and ethnicised notion of au pairing in Norway. The films produce an image of au pairs that working au pairs must deal with. The representations also shape and reflect the way in which au pairing is understood in the public sphere, as can be seen in relation to changes in au pair legislation.

As I argued in the beginning of this introductory chapter, au pairs work. However, the representation of au pairs in the documentaries suggests that au pairs not only work, but also work too much, with little or no compensation. This is well documented by previous research on au pairs, as is made clear in the discussion of au pair research. Yet some of my informants were concerned with distancing themselves from the idea that they work. I argue in the article “It’s not much” that this is because their work has low status, and the au pair scheme allows for an alternative framing of au pairing as a gap year, as cultural exchange

and as a familial – rather than employment – relationship between au pairs and host families. Not all au pairs think that they work, or see themselves as workers, and it is important to acknowledge this. In the article, I point to one strategy used by au pairs to distance themselves from work: claims that the work they do is ‘not much’. Au pairing thus appears simultaneously as work and non-work. The distancing would not take place if the au pair were to genuinely not do work, but, for the au pair, acknowledging the work that she does possibly means compromising her sense of worth in the family.

Many au pairs want to remain in Norway upon the end of their contract, but this is not necessarily straightforward. As I show in the article ‘From intimate relations to citizenship?’, because au pairing is not intended as a migration route, the individual au pair is made responsible for carving out a way to remain in Norway – something that may seem desirable given that she has likely spent two years familiarising herself with the country and the language. This individualised responsibility, however, means that stories of current dating projects were prominent in au pairs’ stories of plans for the future. This may also be the case because au pairs formally lack agency as workers, and socially lack agency as family members. Dating could be a way for au pairs to gain a sense of agency. What became very clear to me during this work was that there was a great deal of chance in terms of the agency my informants described, and I tried to conceptualise agency through citizenship. While formal citizenship rights provided au pairs from the EU/Schengen Area with a good starting point, these rights did not guarantee that they would be able to remain. I use the concept of ‘informal citizenship’ to conceptualise both what may ‘lack’ for au pairs with formal rights who fail to stay on, as well as the ability of those with few or no formal rights – those who have travelled from countries outside the EU and Schengen Area – to be able to find ways of staying in Norway through acquaintances, language skills, a sense of belonging, knowledge of the system and so on. Yet formal citizenship is always governed from above, and au pairing is not

intended as a migration route. As au pairs are not formally meant to stay on, the legislation can be seen as a mechanism of excluding au pairs from the nation.

In the theoretical discussion (part 4, 'Intersectionality at work'), I theorise the au pair scheme through the concept of intersectionality as a way to both explore and explain the current practice of au pairing in Norway. I look at the site of domestic work as a particular place where different social categories intersect, and discuss how the categories of gender, ethnicity, race, migrant status and citizenship, sexuality, age and religion work together in the au pair scheme. Domestic work and carework carry meaning that tie this work to various social categories: women, specifically, but also in the case of paid domestic labour, migrant women, working-class persons and so on. For au pairs in Norway, as I have argued, this categorisation is even more specific, and au pairs are imagined to be poor Filipina women. The labour has low status, and the bodies that perform the labour become associated with this low status, as well as the various social categories that the work is given meaning through.

However, discussion of categories must be done in a situated manner; while each social category has referents outside the specific context I discuss them in, I do not want to presume *what* the categories mean, or indeed *how* they mean. By emphasising the situatedness of the intersection of categories, I hope to avoid securing the meaning of, for example, 'gender', 'ethnicity' or 'class' and the way in which they intersect. In the specific context of au pairing, gender seems to be made invisible by ethnicity, as au pairs do not count as women doing 'women's work' and do not threaten national gender equality as they do not belong within the nation. At the same time, au pairs' 'womanhood' is taken for granted; women's presumed natural capacities as cleaners and carers are important reasons for the existence of the au pair scheme. Au pairs' imagined poverty makes it acceptable for Norwegian host families to pay well below the minimum wage for their labour, through the logic that the labour of someone imagined to be poor is apparently worth less.

## **6.2. The home and the nation: Gender equality and nationalism**

In part four, 'Intersectionality at work', I discuss the way in which different categories interact and shape the practice of au pairing as we see it today. The conclusion that situated intersectionality works to conceptualise the practice of au pairing also depends on a great deal of contextualisation. Part of the relevant context, as I see it, revolves around gender equality, the home and the nation. The literature on au pairs in Norway has a great deal to say about why host families employ au pairs. Given that there are, in fact, few 'real' reasons (e.g. everyone has access to public kindergartens), other reasons might be connected to the shame in doing work that has a very low status, but such work nevertheless needs to be done by someone. It is considered shameful for middle- and upper-class women (mothers, hostesses) to have homes that do not meet the very high standards for a 'decent' home, yet it is also shameful for these women to admit that they do all the domestic work with little help from their male partners (Døving & Klepp, 2010). The solution might be an au pair on 'cultural exchange'.

This is a particularly interesting situation in a society that prides itself on gender equality. The notion that increased use of au pairs can be chalked up to gender equality and, specifically, women's (implicitly excessive) participation in the labour market, is continually reproduced in Norwegian public discourse and some scholarly literature. Sollund (2010b) argues that the au pair scheme lowers the threshold for employing domestic help in Norway, because it is practiced as domestic help yet often spoken of in quite different terms – albeit this is perhaps in the process of changing. In a conference paper I presented in 2012, I argued that the figure of the au pair has the potential to evoke several aspects of discomfort in Norway (Stubberud, 2012a). Au pairs disturb gender equality by serving as a reminder that domestic work is still done by women, they disturb the notion of 'sameness', in terms of class, because they are underpaid and apparently willing to do work that upper- and middle-class Norwegians do not want to do, and they disturb a notion of 'tolerance' and 'sameness' in terms of race and

ethnicity by being, or being constructed as, Filipinas who bring awareness of whiteness, privilege and global inequalities into private homes in a country that is obsessed with equality and sameness.

However, I am now less sure about this argument. Instead, I wonder whether the au pair scheme might, in fact, highlight not only continued economic inequality globally, but also increasing economic inequality in Norway. I believe Marianne Gullestad's seminal work on sameness captures something that is extremely important for understanding Norwegian society over the past few decades (Gullestad, 2002). She describes a cultural practice of avoiding difference to produce an experience of 'sameness' and homogeneity, which in a Norwegian context should be understood in relation to keeping the au pair scheme as 'cultural exchange'. The cultural practice of avoiding difference clashes with paid domestic work because it involves intimate contact between unequal people in terms of class, and different people in terms of ethnicity and race. Sometimes this difference and inequality is precisely what is purchased (Anderson, 2000, p. 7). Yet with the au pair scheme it seems more likely that the myth of sameness and equality is part of the attraction for Norwegian employers.

This idea of sameness also relates to an image of the nation as the family/home (Collins, 1998): an intimate space that is safe, controllable, homogenous and unconflicted (Pratt, 2004, p. 76; see also Berlant, 2000, and Fortier, 2008). The au pair scheme does involve intimate contact between unequal people in terms of class, and different people in terms of race. Nevertheless, it seems that the present political climate is only part of an expression that there is indeed a move in a different direction, wherein these differences are simply something we must accept – also in Norway. Increased social difference, sped up by the political turn to the right that is currently happening in a number of European countries, also seeps into greater acceptance of economic inequality, such as greater acceptance towards displays of wealth. One such display is the employment of au pairs, particularly without the sense of shame that has been somewhat of a trademark

in Norway in relation to the employment of domestic workers (Døving & Klepp, 2010, p. 373). Employing an au pair would indeed be a mighty fine training ground for accepting inequalities in terms of class.

A notion of gender equality may also be disturbed by the presence of au pairs and domestic workers, providing that these workers count as females doing domestic work in the nation. But they do not count in the same way that middle- and upper-class ethnic Norwegian women count. Gender intersects with class, race, ethnicity, religion, age, migrant and visa status and renders migrant domestic workers outsiders. At the same time, the presumption that 'gender equality' is part of 'Norwegian culture' perpetuates a form of conceptual nationalism that builds on colonial discourses (Svendsen, 2014, p. 50). These colonial discourses are part of what produces the racialisation and ethnicisation of paid domestic work and carework, which constructs au pairs as outsiders.

Furthermore, to frame au pairing or the outsourcing of domestic work and carework through a perspective of 'failed gender equality' is to ask the wrong questions. In the larger picture, the tendency to chalk the increase in domestic carework up to gender equality perpetuates a culturally embedded tendency to seek out ways to 'blame feminism' for everything that is problematic related to gender. This is not an issue of failed or not failed gender equality. The most important reason why some people are in the position to employ other people to do work they do not want to do themselves is that they have the money to do so. The devaluation of some types of labour plays a part, of course, along with a number of culturally specific explanations, such as the desire for a large and well kept house and time consuming hobbies, which leave little time for the devalued domestic work and carework. Yet it seems to me that the combination of the salary level and the general standard of living in Norway is the primary reason for the increased employment of au pairs and domestic workers. Along with substantially cheaper plane tickets and the Internet, which make faraway places

imaginable destinations, colonial discourses are evoked by employers to ‘justify’ the practice.

### 6.3. Solutions?

*The UK government has been able to overlook this group of migrants, and exclude them from the most basic protections, not only because they are hidden from sight in private homes, but also because their labour is disguised through its association with the traditional and unpaid work of women. (Cox, 2012, p. 35)*

In the quote above, Cox refers to the change in the au pair migration regime in the UK that rendered au pairs invisible. It is perhaps a tempting ‘solution’ to prohibit au pairs by simply removing the visa category (Gullikstad & Annfelt, forthcoming). Yet, as the situation in the UK indicates, this would only make matters a great deal worse (Busch, 2015). In a sense, the solution appears quite simple: acknowledging au pairing as work, giving au pairs a decent salary for the work they do, giving au pairs a place to live outside their workplace, making their visas independent of their host families and loosening up the migration regime so that au pairing can become a springboard for migration to Norway for more than just those from the ‘right’ countries, or those who are particularly resourceful or skilled in interpersonal relations.

Yet, as mentioned above, some au pairs might object to these legislative changes. As long as the profession they enter into is as stigmatised, lowly paid and undervalued as it is, there are good reasons for them to resist association with it. Au pairing, on the other hand, carries with it a sense of (middle-class) adventure – a transition into adulthood. Indeed, it is considered a life-cycle type of work before a transition into something else. Working as a migrant domestic worker or identifying as such – if ‘domestic worker’ can serve, for a moment, as an identity category – currently means something completely different. The ‘domestic work’ label does not denote adventure and a transitional period, but rather a lowly paid, undervalued profession, or a long and hard struggle to climb the social

ladder. However, were au pairs to take on an identity as a domestic worker, they could potentially own up to the work and achieve a much better, and more visible, political position from which to negotiate working conditions – as, for example, au pairs in Denmark are able to do through their ability to unionise.

In reading the three articles together, it is possible to see how au pairing is a national phenomenon that is shaped by both public discourse and ‘private’ practice. The scheme takes on meaning for host families as well as for au pairs, who may have different expectations and preconceptions about the scheme from their home countries. The articles also clearly indicate that domestic work and carework are sadly undervalued. A great deal of work must be done to rethink the meaning of domestic work and carework – not only to increase the status, acknowledgement and pay for au pairs, but also to increase the status of other kinds of paid and unpaid domestic work and carework more generally. This thesis contributes a discussion of the public meanings of au pairing as domestic work and carework in Norway, as told through the stories of au pairs’ negotiations *as* au pairs, young women, workers, migrants, mothers, girlfriends and students in Norway.

## References

- Aaslund, T. (2013). Au pair-ordningen fungerer bra. Retrieved 14.12.2014, from <http://www.folkehjelp.no/Vaart-arbeid/Asyl-og-integrering/Au-Pair-Center/Nyheter/Au-pair-ordningen-fungerer-bra>.
- Ahmed, S. (2006). *Queer Phenomenology*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press.
- Alsos, K., & Eldrin, L. (2010). Husarbeid uten grenser? *Tidsskrift for kjønnsforskning*, 34(4), 377-93.
- Andersen, Ø. (2013). Tiltalt for å utnytte au pairer: Blankt frifunnet, *Dagbladet*, 06.11.2013.
- Anderson, B. (2000). *Doing the Dirty Work?: The Global Politics of Domestic Labour*. London: Zed Books.
- Anderson, B. (2007). A Very Private Business: Exploring the Demand for Migrant Domestic Workers. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 14(3), 247-64.
- Anderson, B. (2009). What's in a Name? Immigration Controls and Subjectivities: The Case of Au Pairs and Domestic Worker Visa Holders in the UK. *Subjectivity*, 29, 407-24.
- Anim-Addo, J. and Gunaratnam, Y. (2012). Secrets and Lies: Narrative Methods at the Limits of Research. *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice*, 5(3), pp. 387-400
- Anthias, F. (2012). Transnational Mobilities, Migration Research and Intersectionality. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 2(2), 102-10.
- Arbeidstilsynet (2014). Minstelønn - allmenngjøring av tariffavtaler. Retrieved 02.12.2014, from <http://www.arbeidstilsynet.no/fakta.html?tid=90849#L%C3%B8nn-renhold>.
- Au Pair Center (Oslo) (2014). Første Tertialrapport Au Pair Center 2014 januar til og med april 2014. Retrieved 15.05.2014.
- Barker, C. (2012). *Cultural Studies. Theory and Practice* (4th ed.). London: Sage.

- Bauder, H. (2008). Citizenship as Capital: The Distinction of Migrant Labor. *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 33(3), 315–33.
- Berg, A.-J., Flemmen, A. B., & Gullikstad, B. (Eds) (2010). *Likestilte norskheter. Om kjønn og etnisitet*. Trondheim: Tapir.
- Berlant, L. (2000). The subject of true feeling: Pain, privacy, and politics. In J. Dean (Ed.), *Cultural Studies and Political Theory* (pp. 42–62). Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press.
- Berlant, L. (2011). *Cruel Optimism*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press.
- Bhattacharyya, G. (2002). *Sexuality and Society*. London: Routledge.
- Bikova, M. (2008). *A Family Member or a Family Servant? Why Norwegian Families Hire Au Pairs*. Master's thesis, University of Bergen, Bergen. Retrieved from [https://bora.uib.no/bitstream/handle/1956/2739/Masterthesis\\_Bikova.pdf;jsessionid=07EC8D01AF3C1A5DC8533530D185C684.bora-uib\\_worker?sequence=1](https://bora.uib.no/bitstream/handle/1956/2739/Masterthesis_Bikova.pdf;jsessionid=07EC8D01AF3C1A5DC8533530D185C684.bora-uib_worker?sequence=1).
- Bikova, M. (2010). The snake in the grass of gender equality. In L. Widding Isaksen (Ed.), *Global Carework*. Lund: Nordic Academic Press.
- Brah, A. (1999). The Scent of Memory: Strangers, Our Own, and Others. *Feminist Review*, 61, 4–26.
- Braidotti, R. (2010). Nomadism: Against Methodological Nationalism. *Policy Futures in Education*, 8(3/4), 408–18.
- BSGE Research Group (2015). Buying and Selling (Gender) Equality: Feminized Migration and Gender Equality in Contemporary Norway. Retrieved from <http://www.ntnu.no/kult/bsge>.
- Buikema, R., Griffin, G., & Lykke, N. (Eds) (2011). *Theories and Methodologies in Postgraduate Feminist Research*. New York and Oxon: Routledge.
- Buikema, R., & Zarzycka, M. (2011). Visual cultures. In R. Buikema, G. Griffin & N. Lykke (Eds), *Theories and Methodologies in Postgraduate Feminist Research*. New York and Oxon: Routledge.
- Búriková, Z. (2006). The Embarrassment of Co-Presence: Au Pairs and their Rooms. *Home Cultures*, 3(2), 99–122.

- Búriková, Z. (2014). Earning money, learning the language: Slovak au pairs and their passage to adulthood. In N. Makovicky (Ed.), *Neoliberalism, Personhood, and Postsocialism*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Búriková, Z., & Miller, D. (2010). *Au Pair*. Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press.
- Búriková, Z. S. (2015). 'Good families' and the shadows of servitude: Au pair gossip and norms of au pair employment. In R. Cox (Ed.), *Au Pairs' Lives in Global Context*. Hampshire: Palgrave.
- Busch, N. (2015). When work doesn't pay: Outcomes of a deregulated childcare market and au pair policy vacuum in the UK. In R. Cox (Ed.), *Au Pairs' Lives in Global Context*. Hampshire: Palgrave.
- Butler, J. (1999). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Chen, A. (2013). *Ilo Ilo* [film]. Singapore.
- Cho, S., Crenshaw, K., & McCall, L. (2013). Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis. *Signs*, 38(4), 785–810.
- Chow, R. (2002). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Collins, P. H. (1998). It's All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation. *Hypatia*, 13(3), 62–82.
- Council of Europe (1969, 24.11.1969). European Agreement on 'Au Pair' Placement. Retrieved 14.12.2014, from <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/o68.htm>.
- Cox, R. (2006). *The Servant Problem. Domestic Employment in a Global Economy*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris.
- Cox, R. (2007). The Au Pair Body: Sex Object, Sister or Student? *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 14(3).
- Cox, R. (2012). Gendered work and migration regimes. In R. Sollund (Ed.), *Transnational Migration, Gender and Rights*. Bingley: Emerald.
- Cox, R. (Ed.) (2015). *Au Pairs' Lives in Global Context*. Hampshire: Palgrave.

- Cox, R., & Narula, R. (2003). Playing Happy Families: Rules and Relationships in Au Pair Employing Households in London, England. *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 10(4).
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. *The University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 89, 139–67.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–99.
- Dalgas, K. M. (2013). Måltidets bindinger: om filippinske au pairers deltagelse i danske værtsfamilier. In H. O. Mogensen & K. F. Olwig (Eds), *Familie og slægtskab*. Fredriksberg: Samfundslitteratur.
- Dalgas, K. M. (2014). Becoming Independent Through Au Pair Migration: Self-Making and Social Re-Positioning Among Young Filipinas in Denmark. *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*. doi: 10.1080/1070289X.2014.939185
- Danielsen, H. (2013). Den kjønnsdelte arbejdsdagen 1913-1960. In H. Danielsen, E. Larsen & I. W. Ovesen (Eds), *Norsk likestillingshistorie*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- Davis, K. (2008). Intersectionality as Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful. *Feminist Theory*, 9(67).
- Due, A. C. (2011). *Den moderne au pair-familien. Omsorgsorganisering og dagligliv i småbarnsfamilier med au pair*. Master's dissertation, University of Oslo. Retrieved from [https://www.duo.uio.no/bitstream/handle/123456789/18080/Due\\_master.pdf?sequence=2](https://www.duo.uio.no/bitstream/handle/123456789/18080/Due_master.pdf?sequence=2).
- Durin, S. (2015). Ethnicity and the au pair experience: Latin American au pairs in Marseille, France. In R. Cox (Ed.), *Au Pairs' Lives in Global Context*. Hampshire: Palgrave.
- Døving, R., & Klepp, I. G. (2010). Husarbeidets grenser. Når kunnskap erstattes med skam. *Tidsskrift for kjønnsforskning*, 34(4).
- Eggebo, H. (2012). *The Regulation of Marriage Migration to Norway*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Bergen, Bergen.

- Ehrenreich, B., & Hochschild, A. R. (2003). *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. London: Granta Books.
- Energy Au Pair (2014). Advices for au pairs. Retrieved 14.12.2014, from <https://energyaupair.no/aupairs-advices/>.
- Fjell, T. I. (2010). Doing gender equality. In L. W. Isaksen (Ed.), *Global Carework*. Lund: Nordic Academic Press.
- Folkeuniversitetet (2014). Norsk kurs nybegynner A1 - Trondheim. Retrieved 13.12.2014, from <http://www.folkeuniversitetet.no/trondheim/norsk-kurs-nybegynner-a1-trondheim-trondheim/kurs-id-1631817011/>.
- Fonow, M. M., & Cook, J. A. (2005). Feminist Methodology: New Applications in the Academy and Public Policy. *Signs*, 30(4), 221–36.
- Fortier, A.-M. (2008). *Multicultural Horizons. Diversity and the Limits of the Civil Nation*. Oxon and New York: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (2002). *Forelesninger om regjering og styringskunst*. Oslo: Cappelen Damm.
- Frosh, S. (2007). Disintegrating Qualitative Research. *Theory and Psychology*, 17, 635–53.
- Gavanas, A. (2006). De onämnbare. Jämlikhet, ”svenskhet” och privata hushållstjänster i pigdebattens Sverige. In P. d. I. Reyes (Ed.), *Arbetslivets (o)synliga murar* (Vol. SOU 2006: 5).
- Gavanas, A. (2010). *Who Cleans the Welfare State? Migration, Informalization, Social Exclusion and Domestic Services in Stockholm*. Stockholm: Institute for Futures Studies.
- Geserick, C. (2012). ‘I Always Wanted to Go Abroad. And I Like Children’: Motivations of Young People to Become Au Pairs in the USA. *Young*, 20(46).
- Gray, A. (2003). *Research Practice for Cultural Studies: Ethnographic Methods and Lived Cultures*. London: Sage.
- Guitérrez-Rodríguez, E. (2010). *Migration, Domestic Work and Affect*. New York and London: Routledge.

- Gullestad, M. (1989). *Kultur og hverdagsliv: på sporet av det moderne Norge*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Gullestad, M. (2002). *Det norske sett med nye øyne*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Gullikstad, B., & Annfelt, T. (forthcoming). The au pair programme as 'cultural exchange'. The effects of the Norwegian au pair policy on gender equality and citizenship. In B. Gullikstad, G. K. Kristensen & P. Ringrose (Eds), *Paid Domestic Labour in a Changing Europe*. Palgrave.
- Gullikstad, B., Kristensen, G. K., & Ringrose, P. (Eds) (forthcoming). *Paid Domestic Labour in a Changing Europe: Questions of Gender Equality and Gendered Citizenship*. Palgrave.
- Gunaratnam, Y. (2003). *Researching Race and Ethnicity: Methods, Knowledge and Power*. London: Sage.
- Haavind, H. (1984). Love and power in marriage. In H. Holter (Ed.), *Patriarchy in a Welfare Society* (pp. 136–67). Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Haraway, D. (1988). Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism as a Site of Discourse on the Part of Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575–99.
- Hemsing, G. A. (2003). *Fra au pair til under pari: norske au pairer – mellom roller og stereotyper*. Master's thesis, University of Oslo, Oslo.
- Hess, S., & Puckhaber, A. (2004). 'Big Sisters' are Better Domestic Servants?! Comments on the Booming Au Pair Business. *Feminist Review*, 77, 65–78.
- Hochschild, A. R. (2000). Global care chains and emotional surplus value. In A. Giddens & W. Hutton (Eds), *On The Edge. Living With Global Capitalism*. London: Vintage.
- Hübinette, T., & Lundström, C. (2011). Sweden After the Recent Election: The Double-Binding Power of Swedish Whiteness through the Mourning of the Loss of "Old Sweden" and the Passing of "Good Sweden". *NORA*, 19(1), 42–52.
- Isaksen, L. W. (2010). *Global Carework: Gender and Migration in Nordic Societies*. Lund: Nordic Academic Press.
- Järvinen, M. (2000). The Biographical Illusion: Constructing Meaning in Qualitative Interviews. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 6(3), 370–91.

- Keskinen, S. (2011) Troublesome Differences – Dealing with Gendered Violence, Ethnicity, and ‘Race’ in the Finnish Welfare State. *Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology and Crime Prevention*, 12, pp. 153-72
- Keskinen, S. (2012). Limits to Speech? The Racialised Politics of Gendered Violence in Denmark and Finland. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 33(3), 261-274
- Keskinen, S., Tuori, S., Irni, S., & Mulinari, D. (Eds) (2009). *Complying with Colonialism: Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic Region*. Abingdon and Oxon: Ashgate.
- Kjeldstad, R., & Lappegård, T. (2008). Mest fornøyd med (delvis) likestilling. *Samfunnsspeilet*, 1(5/6).
- Kristensen, G. K. (2015). A fair deal? Paid domestic labour in social democratic Norway. In A. Triandafyllidou & S. Marchetti (Eds), *Employers, Agencies and Immigration. Paying for Care* (pp. 207–25). Farnham: Ashgate.
- Kristensen, G. K., & Ravn, M. N. (forthcoming). The Voices Heard and the Voices Silenced. Recruitment Processes in Qualitative Interview Studies.
- Kårstad, G. (2013). *Kvinne 2013: De gode hjelperne*. Oslo: NRK.
- Lather, P. A. (2007). *Getting Lost: Feminist Efforts Toward a Double(d) Science*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Law, J. (2004). *After Method. Mess in Social Science Research*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Law, J., & Mol, A. (Eds). (2002). *Complexities. Social Studies of Knowledge Practices*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press.
- Lewis, G. (2006). Imaginaries of Europe: Technologies of Gender, Economies of Power. *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 13(2), 87–102.
- Lewis, G. (2013). Unsafe Travel: Experiencing Intersectionality and Feminist Displacement. *Signs*, 38(4), 869–92.
- Liarou, E. (2015). ‘Pink slave’ or the ‘modern young woman’? A history of the au pair in Britain. In R. Cox (Ed.), *Au Pairs’ Lives in Global Context*. Hampshire: Palgrave.

- Liversage, A., Bille, R., & Jakobsen, V. (2013). *Den danske au pair-ordning*. København: SFI - Det nationale forskningscenter for velfærd.
- Loftsdóttir, K., & Jensen, L. (Eds). (2012). *Whiteness and Postcolonialism in the Nordic Region*. Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate.
- Lohne, L. (2014). Få vil være barnevakt i utlandet [Few want to babysit abroad], *Dagens Næringsliv*, 14.11.2014.
- Lundström, C. (2014). *White Migrations: Gender, Whiteness and Privilege in Transnational Migration*. Hampshire: Palgrave.
- Lutz, H. (2011). *The New Maids: Transnational Women and the Care Economy*. London: Zed Books.
- Lutz, H. (Ed.) (2008). *Migration and Domestic Work: A European Perspective on a Global Theme*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Lutz, H., Vivar, M. T. H., & Supik, L. (Eds) (2011). *Framing Intersectionality. Debates on a Multi-Faceted Concept in Gender Studies*. Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate.
- Lønseth, P. K. (2012). Kulturutveksling, ikke arbeidsinnvandring, *Dagbladet*, 27.01.2012.
- Manalansan, M. F. (2006). Queer Intersections: Sexuality and Gender in Migration Studies. *IMR*, 40(1), 224-49.
- McCall, L. (2005). The Complexity of Intersectionality. *Signs*, 30(3).
- McDowell, L. (2008). Thinking Through Work: Complex Inequalities, Constructions of Difference and Trans-national Migrants. *Progress in Human Geography*, 32(4), 491-507.
- Mellini, L., Yodanis, C., & Godenzi, A. (2007). On Par? The Role of the Au Pair in Switzerland and France. *European Societies*, 9(1), 45-64.
- Mohanty, C. T. (1988). Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses. *Feminist Review*, 30, 61-88.
- Mohanty, C. T., & Martin, B. (2003). What's home got to do with it? In C. T. Mohanty (Ed.), *Feminism Without Borders*. Durham, NC: Duke.

- Moi, T. (2014). *Thinking as a Feminist: What Ordinary Language Philosophy Can Do for Feminist Theory*. Paper presented at the NORA – Voices in Nordic Gender Research, Roskilde University.
- Moltu, B. (2004). Etnografi og kunnskapsproduksjon. Om å skrive seg ut av feltarbeidet. *Norsk antropologisk tidsskrift*, 4.
- Mæland, P. A. (2012). Forby au pair-ordningen, *Bergens Tidende*, 08.03.2012. Retrieved from <http://www.bt.no/nyheter/lokalt/--Forby-au-pair-ordningen-2667389.html>.
- OECD (2014). Better Life Index: Norway. Retrieved 13.01.2015, from <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/norway/>.
- Parreñas, R. S. (2001). *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration and Domestic Work*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Pelechova, L. (2015). Au Pairs and Changing Family Needs in the United Kingdom. In A. Triandafyllidou & S. Marchetti (Eds), *Employers, Agencies and Immigration*. Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate.
- Pérez, M. A. (2015). The cosmopolitan dilemma: Fantasy, work and the experience of Mexican au pairs in the USA. In R. Cox (Ed.), *Au Pairs' Lives in Global Context*. Hampshire: Palgrave.
- Phillips, L., & Jørgensen, M. W. (2002). *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. London: Sage.
- Pickering, M. (Ed.) (2008). *Research Methods in Cultural Studies*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Pink, S. (2009). *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Platzer, E. (2002). Kulturellt utbyte eller billig arbeidskraft? Au pair i Sverige [Cultural exchange or cheap labour power? Au pairs in Sweden]. *Sociologisk Forskning*, 39(3/4), 32-57.
- Plummer, K. (2003). *Intimate Citizenship*. Seattle, WA and London: University of Washington Press.
- Pratt, G. (2004). *Working Feminism*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Purkayastha, B. (2012). Intersectionality in a Transnational World. *Gender & Society*, 26(1), 55-66.

- Rapley, T. (2004). Interviews. In C. Seale (Ed.), *Qualitative Research Practice*. London: Sage.
- Rodríguez, E. G. (2008). Reading Affect – On the Heterotopian Spaces of Care and Domestic Work in Private Households. *Historical Social Research*, 33(1), 252–77.
- Rohde, C. (2012). From Germany With Love: Transnational Family Networks and Daughterhood Constructions of Russian Au Pair Migrants. *Transnational Social Review*, 2(2), 121–37.
- Rommetveit, A. (Writer) (2006). Mammarant [documentary], *Dokument 2*. Bergen: Unisvisjon.
- Sassen, S. (2010). The Global Inside The National. *Sociopedia.isa*.  
<http://www.saskiasassen.com/pdfs/publications/the-global-inside-the-national.pdf>
- Skatteetaten (2014). Kost og losji. Retrieved 02.12.2014, from  
<http://www.skatteetaten.no/no/Tabeller-og-satser/Kost-og-losji/?ssy=2014>.
- Skeggs, B. (2000). Feminist ethnography. In P. Atkinson, A. Coffey, S. Delamont, J. Lofland, & L. Lofland (Eds), *Handbook of Ethnography*. London: Sage.
- Solheim, J. (1998). *Den åpne kroppen: om kjønnsymbolikk i moderne kultur*. Oslo: Pax.
- Solheim, J. (2007). *Kjønn & Modernitet*. Oslo: Pax.
- Sollund, R. (2010a). Au pairordningen i Norge: Rolleforståelse og praksis blant au pairer og vertsfamilier. *Sosiologi i dag*, 1/2.
- Sollund, R. (2010b). Regarding Au Pairs in the Norwegian Welfare State. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 17(2), 143–60.
- Sollund, R. (2012a). Arbeidsmigrantene [feature article], *Dagbladet*, 25.01.2012.
- Sollund, R. (2012b). The essence of food and gender and the embodiment of migration. In R. Sollund (Ed.), *Transnational Migration, Gender and Rights* (pp. 77–98). Bingley: Emerald.
- Statistics Norway (2009, 26.03.2009). Stadig flere småbarnsfamilier kjøper vaskehjelp. Retrieved 09.12.2014, from

<http://www.ssb.no/forskning/demografi-og-levekaar/levekaar-og-sosial-deltaking/stadig-flere-smaabarnsfamilier-kjoeper-vaskehjelp>.

Statistics Norway (2012, 18.01.2012). Mindre fritid, mer husholdsarbeid.

*Tidsbruksundersøkelsen, 2010*. Retrieved 10.12.2014.

Statistics Norway (2014a). Gjennomsnittlig månedslønn for heltidsansatte i helseforetakene, etter kjønn, yrke, tid og statistikkvariabel. Retrieved 02.12.2014, from

<https://www.ssb.no/statistikkbanken/selectout/ShowTable.asp?Fileformat=Id=2&Queryfile=20141214154517353921692LonnHelseYrle2&PLanguage=o&MainTable=LonnHelseYrle2&potsize=1>.

Statistics Norway (2014b, 20.03.2014). Lønn, alle ansatte, 2014. Retrieved 02.12.2014, from <http://www.ssb.no/lonnansatt>.

Stenum, H. (2010a). Au-pair migration and new inequalities. In L. Widding Isaksen (Ed.), *Global Carework*. Lund: Nordic Academic Press.

Stenum, H. (2010b). Au pair-strategier i danske familier – privat husarbejder eller maternalistisk mikrostyring. *Kvinder, køn & forskning*, 4.

Stenum, H. (2010c). Fortidens tjenestepiger og nutidens au pairs? Har de noget til fælles? *Arbejderhistorie*, 2, 66–83.

Stenum, H. (2011a). *Abused Domestic Workers in Europe: The Case of Au Pairs*. Brussels: European Parliament, Directorate General for Internal Policies, Policy Dept. C: Citizens' rights and constitutional affairs.

Stenum, H. (2011b). *Migration Management at the Margins. Transnationalized and Localized Government of Marginalized Migrants in Denmark: Au Pairs and Destitute EU Citizens*. Doctoral thesis, Aalborg University, SPIRIT & Department of Culture and Global Studies, Aalborg.

Stubberud, E. (2012a). *Au Pairs and the Fantasy of the Norwegian Welfare State. Questions of Equality and Citizenship*. Paper presented at the conference Thought as Action, University of Bergen, Bergen.

Stubberud, E. (2012b). *Student or Maid? Analysis of the Rhetoric of Norwegian Au Pair Websites*. Paper presented at the Gender, Work & Organization conference, Keele University, Keele.

- Stubberud, E. (2015). 'It's not much': Affective (boundary) work in the au pair scheme. In R. Cox (Ed.), *Au Pairs' Lives in Global Context*. Hampshire: Palgrave.
- Stubberud, E. (2015). Framing the Au Pair. Problems of Sex, Work, and Motherhood in Norwegian Au Pair Documentaries. *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 23(2), 125-39
- Stubberud, E. (forthcoming). From intimate relations to citizenship? Au pairing and the potential for (straight) citizenship in Norway. In B. Gullikstad, G. K. Kristensen & P. Ringrose (Eds), *Paid Domestic Labour in a Changing Europe: Questions of Gender Equality and Gendered Citizenship*. Palgrave.
- Sunde, I., & Isungset, O. (Writers) (2013). *Herskap og tenarar* [television series], *Brennpunkt*. Oslo: NRK.
- Svendsen, S. H. B. (2014). *Affecting Change? Cultural Politics of Sexuality and 'Race' in Norwegian Education*. Doctoral thesis, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim.
- Sørheim, T. I. (2012, 21.09.2012). Vi pusser opp for 60 milliarder i år. Retrieved 02.12.2014, from <http://e24.no/privat/eiendom/vi-pusser-opp-for-60-milliarder-i-aar/20276396>.
- Tkach, O. (2014). Migrant au pairs in Norway: From multi-faceted work to prospects of settling down. In M. Pajnik & F. Anthias (Eds), *Work and the Challenges of Belonging* (pp. 134–52). Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Triandafyllidou, A., & Marchetti, S. (Eds) (2015). *Employers, Agencies and Immigration. Paying for Care*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- UDI (2014a). Au Pair Permit. Retrieved 03.12.2014, from <http://www.udi.no/en/want-to-apply/au-pair/au-pair-permit/?c=phl>.
- UDI (2014b). Contract for Cultural Exchange Between Au Pair and Host Family. Retrieved 14.12.2014, from <http://www.udi.no/globalassets/global/skjemaer/kontrakt-au-pair-contract-au-pair-be.pdf>.
- UDI (2014 c) Rundskriv om forvaltningstiltak mot vertsfamilier som bryter vilkårene for oppholdstillatelse for au pair- utlendingsloven § 27 b (2014c).

- Retrieved 03.12.2014, from <http://www.udiregelverk.no/no/rettskilder/udirundskriv/rs-2014-008/>
- UDI (2014d). Studietillatelse. Retrieved 28.12.2014, from <http://www.udi.no/skal-soke/studier1/studier/#link-58>.
- utdanning.no (2014, 03.07.2014). Barnehageassistent. Retrieved 02.12.2014, from <http://utdanning.no/yrker/beskrivelse/barnehageassistent>.
- Weeks, K. (2011). *The Problem With Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Kindle ed.). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Wetherell, M. (2012). *Affect and Emotion*. London: Sage.
- Williams, A. M., & Baláz, V. (2004). From Private to Public Sphere, the Commodification of the Au Pair Experience? Returned Migrants From Slovakia to the UK. *Environment and Planning*, 36, 1813–33.
- Williams, L. (2010). *Global Marriage: Cross-Border Marriage Migration in Global Context*. New York: Palgrave.
- Wittig, M. (1989). On the Social Contract. *Feminist Issues* (Spring), 3–12.
- Wolkowitz, C. (2002). The Social Relations of Body Work. *Work, Employment & Society*, 16(3), 497–510.
- Yeates, N. (2012). Global Care Chains: A State-of-the-Art Review and Future Directions in Care Transnationalization Research. *Global Networks*, 12(2), 135–54.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (1993). Gender and Nation. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 16(4).
- Yuval-Davis, N. (1996). Women and the Biological Reproduction of “the Nation”. *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 19(1/2), 17–24.
- Øien, C. (2009). *On Equal Terms? An Evaluation of the Norwegian Au Pair Scheme*. Oslo: Fafo.
- Østbakken, K. M. (2014). Kjønn, lønn og barn - hva betyr barn for timelønnsnivået til kvinner og menn? *Søkelys på arbeidslivet*(3).

## 7. 'It's not much': Affective (boundary) work in the au pair scheme<sup>12</sup>

In this chapter I examine the content of au pair work in Norway as it slides between care work, service work and domestic work. On the surface, the work au pairs do in Norwegian families seems simple: light housework and child-minding, what any good 'big sister' would do. And indeed, all the au pairs I interviewed stated, regarding their work, that 'it's not much'. However, the stories they told often contradicted or complicated that statement, so why was this description of the work so common? Is the statement 'it's not much' a way of affectively negating the extent or drudgery of the labour involved in au pairing?

Thinking with the concept of affective labour, I examine the strategies au pairs use in order to navigate the unclear boundaries between domestic worker and 'family member'. How do au pairs think about their work? Besides the great variety of physical labour carried out, I am interested in how affective labour figures in au pairs' stories of work. By affective labour, I mean the effort put into the psychosocial aspects of living as an au pair. What does affective labour in the context of au pairing *do* and *mean* for au pairs? The regulations of the au pair scheme are unclear and this calls for a great deal of negotiation on the part of au pairs and host families.

In this chapter I consider affective boundary work as a concept that might help conceptualise these negotiations as integral to au pair-work. After briefly introducing the au pair scheme as it is practiced in Norway, I sketch out the concepts of affective labour and boundary work. Based on close analysis of three au pair stories, gathered as part of a larger project, I find two types of affective boundary work: Au pairs creating a boundary between themselves and the work, and through doing this racialising the work; and au pairs creating a boundary

---

<sup>12</sup> The article is published in the book *Au Pairs' Lives in Global Context. Sisters or Servants?* Edited by Rosie Cox (2015).

between themselves and the host family in an attempt at professionalisation. I conclude by arguing that affective boundary work is an inherent part of au pairing because au pairs perform low-status domestic work without officially *being* domestic workers. Is the phrase 'it's not much' an expression of the wider social inequalities that constitute the foundation for the current practice of the au pair scheme? My analysis suggests this is the case, based on au pairs narratives from Norway.

### 7.1. Au pairing in Norway

The au pair scheme is intended as cultural exchange for foreign nationals between the ages of 18 and 30. In exchange for 30 hours a week of tasks that might involve light housework and childcare, the au pair gets free board and lodging with the host family, Norwegian classes, and around 600 Euros monthly before tax as 'pocket money'. The au pair cannot have children of his/her own (yet it seems that this means that au pairs conceal information about their children), and in order to obtain a 2-year au pair visa it must be likely that the applicant will return to their home country at the end of the contract. The visa is only valid as long as au pairs live with a host family, and au pairs have to re-apply for a residence permit if they change host families. The fee for this is currently around 300 Euros. Au pairs from the European Union (EU), European Economic Area (EEA) and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA)<sup>13</sup> only have to register upon arrival, while au pairs from the Nordic states do not have to register at all. Despite different rules, all my informants chose to use the standardised au pair contract designed for visa holders.

Au pairing in Norway takes place in a context where gender equality is culturally celebrated and paying for domestic work is generally frowned upon. Mariya

---

<sup>13</sup> Au pairs from countries outside these agreements have to apply for a visa. Only those applying for a visa enter the statistics, so although 1,600 people acquired a visa in 2012, the total number of au pairs is likely to be at least twice this figure. 98 per cent of all visa applicants are women (Øien, 2009, p. 22). The number of au pairs has increased since year 2000, and 84 percent of au pair in the statistics travel from the Philippines (Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, 2013).

Bikova (2010) has argued that the 'stalled revolution' in the nuclear family and the 'incomplete revolution' in women's roles 'create a cultural lag that opens a space for the outsourcing of care work and household chores' (Bikova, 2010, p. 50). In light of this, Ragnhild Sollund (2010) has shown how families legitimise employing au pairs by claiming to do 'micro aid', or by emphasizing fictive family relations with the au pair. However, Cecilie Øien (2009) has stated that au pairing in Norway is best defined as work, and that it is unlikely that host families would have au pairs if they did not need extra help around the house. Nevertheless, au pairing is not defined as work in Norway, with the benefits that would entail and au pairs and host families are left to (affectively) negotiate the discrepancy between policy and practice.

## **7.2. Affective labour and boundary work**

In the longstanding discussion in feminism regarding what counts as labour, Kathi Weeks notes that the 'recognition of the household as a site of social reproduction entailed the important struggle to expand existing notions of work' (Weeks, 2007, p. 235). How can the au pair scheme, based on the notion of 'light housework' and the possibility of childcare, not be counted as work but rather 'cultural exchange'? Constructing live-in au pairs as 'part of the family' suggests that they can enter an intimate position, and the notion of 'family' evokes an affective response; it promises loyalty, as well as demanding emotional investment, naturalising certain types of affective labour (Eng, 2010; Akalin, 2007). How, then, can we attempt to address, conceptualise and understand the 'extra work', that which is labourious but does not feature in a description of 'work'?

An option might be to look at what potential the concept of affect, and affective work, could have. Margaret Wetherell has defined affect as 'embodied meaning-making' (Wetherell, 2012, p. 4). She notes that:

*Affect is ... practical, communicative and organised. In affective practice, bits of the body ... get patterned together with feelings and thoughts, interaction patterns and relationships, narratives and interpretive repertoires, social relations, personal histories, and ways of life. (ibid., 13-14)*

Wetherell does not draw a strict line between bodies, talk and text, and neither does Encarnación Rodríguez (2008), who argues that attention to the affective as well as discourse enables us to see that which is not being said, intensities that do not find their match in words, but that nevertheless are significant in encounters between people. I use affective labour here to describe the effort that goes into the psychosocial aspects of au pairing. Affective labour usually does not register in consciousness as work, but rather as part of the energy spent on being in the world, or in the space of one's work.

The ambiguous legal framework regulating au pairing suggests that a lot of negotiation is done by host families and au pairs (Búriková, 2015) and attention to affective work could help in shedding light on this kind of work as equally important to (re-)productive domestic labour. The negotiations done by au pairs evoke the notion of boundary work, defined as strategies and practices to create and maintain social categories as well as spatial boundaries (Lan, 2003, p. 526). I use this definition of the concept of boundary work in concurrence with the concept of affective labour as a tool for exploring the work au pairs do that does not fully register as labour.

### **7.3. Analysing affect**

The material presented below is based on interviews with 15 current or former au pairs in Norway, and was selected by reading transcriptions and listening to audio tapes of the interviews with attention to affect. This entails attention to affect in the interview context including discursive re-enactments of intensities and emotions, as well as in the analyses afterwards. The analytic strategy, which Stine H. Bang Svendsen (2014) has called 'affective inquiry', helps highlight

instances where issues that have significance beyond what is being stated in discourse, are present in the material, through, for example, changes in the voice or body language during the interview, explicit displays of emotions when describing certain situations, or repeated use of certain words that allude to specific affective states. Attentiveness to these elements of a research interview is especially important here, as the interviews were conducted in Norwegian or English, neither of which are the au pairs' first languages, and the latter is also my own second language. The interviews revolved around issues of work, motivations for au pairing, intimacy and relations with host families, as well as partners and children in the home country. The stories below are selected because affective intensity is conveyed particularly clearly in these stories, and they shed light on the question of affective labour as part of the au pair scheme.

#### **7.4. Affective au pairing**

Here I present three data stories about Evelyn, Inez and Gabriela and use these to explore the following questions: What affective labour surfaces in the interview? What affective boundary work is being done, and how? What does affective labour in the context of au pairing *do* or *mean* for the au pairs?

##### **Evelyn**

Evelyn was a 27-year-old woman from East Asia<sup>14</sup>. She had a university degree and had worked for a few years in a stressful Human Resources job. The pressure at work combined with a desire to broaden her horizons beyond what travelling as a tourist could offer, made her decide to take two years off and become an au pair, to 'relax and have fun'. At the time of the interview she had been staying in a wealthy neighbourhood with a family of four for around 12 months, but was in the process of leaving. When talking about her background for au pairing, she told me that she used to employ a maid herself back in the home country:

---

<sup>14</sup> In order to protect my informants' identity I have chosen not to specify their countries of origin.

*I was a bit picky about the cleaning ... [but] I wouldn't order her .... 'Cause I think that I'm educated and I'm not rude .... I don't look down on her.*

She then told me about her own experiences as an au pair:

*In the beginning I never thought I'm going to work in somebody's house. ... I used to be very professional and all of the sudden I became a kind of a domestic worker. ... [speaks quietly] I mean, you have to persuade yourself to say 'this is okay, it's not a big deal. It's not too much work', it's like if you're ... a big sister, you need to help your parents .... Because that's your job. If you don't, if you keep on resist it, keep on [emphasising] resisting it you'll feel... you'll dislike it. You'll feel like, 'I need to go, I need to go [sounds agitated] .... So, this is... something you have to adjust yourself to. If you don't, if you can't persuade yourself, ... then you'll be out. That's your problem.*

In the excerpt above Evelyn used the story of the maid to illustrate how she thought domestic workers should be treated, followed by a story of how she perceived herself as a domestic worker, suggesting that this transition was not entirely smooth. The tension between Evelyn's two positions becomes particularly clear in the statement that she needed to persuade herself that the job was ok, suggesting that in reality she perceived it as degrading. The persuasion involved drawing on the language of family, equating herself to a big sister as opposed to an employee. This affective labour seems to be necessary because of Evelyn's middle class background and education level, and it appears as an attempt to negotiate loss of social status. Yet Evelyn's willingness to do it also indicates that there is something in it for her making the job worthwhile after all.

Although she stated that she came to have fun, Evelyn appeared to do a significant amount of work including tidying, cooking, cleaning and babysitting – often beyond her working hours. This, it seemed, she did not mind. She had become especially close with one of the children, a five-year-old girl, and stated that:

*After the kindergarten she likes to play with me .... Kids are very innocent, if you're the parent and you spend more time playing with them, they will like you. The parents don't spend too much time with the kids, so she came to me and I like to play. ... She loves me and I love her.*

Evelyn had also taken it upon herself to prepare the child for starting school:

*I really did my best to educate her. I taught her English and some mathematics.*

She also took the girl to a cultural event arranged by the expat-association in the city, where the girl had performed a song in Evelyn's mother tongue, to the crowd's great excitement.

In the first quote above it appears that Evelyn did not think the host parents spent enough time with the children. The way she mentioned the parents in the same sentence as she talked about her own close relationship with the child, it appears that she understood her own attentiveness as a replacement for the missing presence of the host parents. Furthermore, to teach the child English and the song in her own mother tongue can be interpreted as a way for Evelyn to make the child more similar to herself, more her own. Throughout the interview it became clear to me that Evelyn was concerned with foregrounding the close relationship between herself and the child, doing affective work to convince herself that the pairing was acceptable.

As it turned out, however, all was not well. The girl had language development issues and soon after the host parents found out this they decided to fire Evelyn. She stated that the reason for this was that:

*The parents want her to spend more time in a pure Norwegian environment. I could speak some Norwegian, but it's not advanced and very basic.*

Frustrated, Evelyn described the feeling of being fired:

*I was always an excellent employee. Whenever I leave a job, the boss always asks me to stay. [Sad] ... I tried to do my best and to educate them.*

Evelyn perceived herself as an equal to, and part of, the family. She was affectively invested in the girl, and made an effort to educate her. Other studies have shown how au pairs and nannies do boundary work in relation to the mother of the children they were looking after so not to threaten her 'real' motherhood (Anderson, 2000; Cheever, 2003; Cox, 2011; Macdonald, 1998). In Evelyn's case it seems that she was fired because she got too emotionally invested in the child and started playing a role that was not available to her but that she thought she had access too, namely that of a family member. The host family on the other hand did not seem willing to change their structure and incorporate Evelyn as part of the family in any genuine way. Thus her affective investment seemed excessive. In this instance, the boundary between the au pair and the host family became visible as the au pair was seen to stretch beyond her 'mandate'. In becoming too invested in the child and failing to do the required boundary work, Evelyn was fired. It seems that Evelyn's affective work of accepting her role as a domestic worker in the family came a little too late; had she 'played the part' of the subordinate servant better, she might have stayed.

Evelyn's statement about the family wanting a 'pure Norwegian' environment might not have been as much about language as about failed cultural exchange. Evelyn did not seem to perceive her influences on the child as welcome in the family, and her comment about her own language suggests that without her presence the child could be 'fixed' and turned back into a 'proper Norwegian'. Evelyn's story points to a cultural hierarchy that au pairs enter into upon moving in with a family, where Norwegian culture is worth learning for foreigners – but also protecting from the 'pollution' of other cultures. This is a deeply worrying trait that can be seen in conjunction with racism, and that also is the exact opposite of the original goal of the au pair scheme (Liarou, 2015) which was introduced partly as a way of encouraging young Europeans to learn about each other to prevent further conflicts in the future (Øien, 2009, p. 32).

### **Inez**

Inez was a 31 year old woman from South-East Asia with some university education. She had financial responsibilities to her family, and became an au pair after being recruited by a friend whose host family she took over. Inez portrayed her host family as nice and welcoming, and described a working situation that was both predictable and agreed upon. Talking about the first few weeks of her stay, Inez noted that:

*It was a good thing that the host family had [friend] working there first. So it's like the relationship was ... already established .... And ... there is no big difference between our names, 'Ineeez!' [mimicking the children calling]. ... I have this other friend, she moved to Denmark. They had an au pair before whose name was Jocelyn. This friend of mine is also Jocelyn, so they choose her so that the kids didn't have to be conscious of - 'oh, another name, another...' ... My host mother was also worried, how would the kids react when my friend moved out, and how would they accept me? But, no, it was just automatic that they loved me also.*

While Inez was clearly replacing the host parents in the house to some extent in terms of doing household chores and childcare that the busy host parents had outsourced, the quote above indicates that it was as much a matter of replacing other au pairs. It seems that Inez thinks it is good if the children do not have to learn new names. Names represent personification, and the implication of what Inez is saying is that au pairs are not persons in the same sense as the rest of the family are. Inez's reflections around names point to a historical practice whereby servants were called by a name related to their post. This 'kept the domestic [worker] at a distance and underscored her subordinated status' (Hegstrom, 2006, p. 28). Inez and the other au pairs are not people with personalities, and the children have to do less affective work if the au pairs can be perceived as generic and replaceable.

Inez described being an au pair as totally different from other types of work. She stated that:

*Inside their house I have to be like very careful with my actions.... I cannot express my own opinion... I just always say yes, [because] it's not my house. ... I have no right to go against [the host parents], so that's it. .... Like, if for example like [the host family would say] 'then go back home!'. We are afraid of losing everything.*

Later in the interview I asked Inez if there was anything she could not speak with the host mother about, and she stated that religion was a no-go:

*INEZ: [Host mum] doesn't believe in God, and she told me first time, 'Inez, you cannot bring Jesus in my home.' Okay.*

*ELISABETH: What did she mean by that?*

*INEZ: I cannot speak about Jesus inside her house. Like maybe I cannot tell stories about Jesus or share my beliefs about Jesus.*

*ELISABETH: Do you want to?*

*INEZ: I, I wanted to, but since she did not believe, so what's the purpose? She's basing her beliefs on facts. Mmm. And there's this book on Charles Darwin, 'you have to read that, on the evolution of man'. No, no, no, no, I don't need to. [chuckles]*

Inez had made it clear to the host mother that she was religious, but the host mother forbade her to talk about her beliefs. The unequal power dynamics as experienced by Inez are very clear in these two excerpts. Inez was aware that her visa depended on her relationship with the host family, and the fear of having to leave Norway prematurely was stronger than the desire to speak her opinion. In the process, she had to do the affective labour of becoming invisible; of wanting to speak, but deciding against it out of fear of offending or otherwise upsetting the family. Yet, the question 'what's the purpose' might also indicate that communicating her views to the host family was not necessarily very important to Inez. Aware that she was, or tried to be, invisible to them, they were temporal to her. She had found the host family as part of her own quest to become a financial provider for her family, but the visa regulations in the au pair scheme

meant that even though the working relationship between Inez and the host parents was functioning well, she could not stay there beyond her two years. Thus, it is also possible to interpret the work of becoming invisible as a way for Inez to protect herself; by keeping her personality, moods, preferences and plans away from the intimate and family-like relation with the host family, she could perhaps partly protect herself from the potential pains of becoming affectively invested.

### **Gabriela**

Gabriela was a white middle-class, 18 year old woman from Central Europe, who was spending a gap year as an au pair in Norway before starting her tertiary studies. She was motivated by cultural exchange and wanted to be part of a family where her main task would be looking after the children in the house, whom she also expected to develop a close relationship with. This, however, was far from Gabriela's reality. She had arrived in a wealthy family that had hired au pairs for a number of years. Gabriela gathered that they wanted an au pair who could tidy, cook, clean and wash clothes. Childcare was not a main concern, to Gabriela's great disappointment, and she had not formed a close bond with the children:

*I'm the last au pair out of six or seven, so you can imagine the bonding with the children [ironic].*

Expecting to primarily do childcare is a potential road to disappointment for au pairs. With children supposedly being the 'meaning of life' in Norway (Fjell, 2008), there is status in spending 'quality time' with children. In addition 90 per cent of Norwegian children between the ages 1 and 5 go to kindergarten (Statistics Norway, 2011). Thus, childcare could be seen to rank above other types of house- and care work. Gabriela's anger at not bonding with the children might thus be related to doing tasks at the bottom of the hierarchy of household chores. The fact that she mentioned the number of previous au pairs also alludes to a sense of replaceability.

It was clear throughout the interview that Gabriela harboured a great deal of anger and frustration towards the host family and her role with them. She repeatedly described herself as she thought the family perceived her, based on her interpretation of how they treated her:

*I didn't come here to work, I came here to be a family member. ... I don't feel like a family member because for them I'm just a cheap person .... I'm cheaper than a babysitter and a cleaning lady. ... And then... I often ask them to speak Norwegian with me because I learn it and improve, but they just speak [the language of Gabriela's home country] at home.*

She had tried talking to the host family about the lack of cultural exchange, language practice and her work tasks, but they stated that she had to accept the situation or leave – again alluding to replaceability. It also appears through her story that she did not think the family respected her wishes, for example by not speaking Norwegian to her. Gabriela's anger might be interpreted as a strategy for distancing herself from what she perceived as disrespect from the host family.

Towards the end of the interview she started to theorise about how her situation in the family might have improved:

*They employed some Filipina girls when the kids were younger, and that was actually the mistake. They should have got an au pair from Western Europe when the kids were smaller because then the work was really on the kids, and I know many Filipina girls who don't care about kids, just cleaning, so probably they should have swapped it and first had someone from the Western world to care for the children, and now someone who like cleaning.*

It appears that before Gabriela arrived in Norway, she had simply not thought of the possibility of fulfilling a function that was primarily based on her ability to do physical labour in the house. It also appears in the quote above that she was doing affective labour to distance herself, not just from the family but also from the work and her own failure to do it. In what seems like an attempt at

distancing, Gabriela created a hierarchy of tasks where she argued that the host family had misread her and placed her too low on the social ladder. The consequence of this kind of argument is the racialisation of domestic work. Where Gabriela is, Asian women apparently belong, and she suggested that these women were fundamentally different to her. While her capacities were in childcare because she is Western and implicitly white, the Asian women were apparently suited to hard physical labour that Gabriela herself found demeaning. Thus, as a way of ridding herself of bad feelings connected to her 'failure' as an au pair, she constructed this 'failure' as proof of her own (global) class and racial status - precisely because she was unable to do the work she deemed Asian women better suited for.

#### **7.5. Processes of 'othering' and strategies of boundary work**

With the stories above I have tried to show some of the affective work done by au pairs. What becomes clear is that the au pair scheme provides au pairs and host families with little clue as to what role au pairs should or could play in the family. As outsiders on the inside they could become family members, domestic workers, strangers, friends, or keep moving between these categories. This lack of clarity creates a need for au pairs to continually negotiate positions, and affective boundary work is a consequence of as well as a strategy for this. Determining what are acceptable and desirable degrees of affective investment in the family unit might be a way of negotiating their role in the family. However, whilst au pairs come from the outside and go into the intimate sphere of the private home, the family - who might also do affective (boundary) work - is still on home turf. Thus there is a certain precariousness in the position of arriving in the family as a stranger from the outside.

Given the diverging expectations of au pairs and host families, and the various and unforeseeable interpersonal dynamics between them, it is no wonder that the au pair arrangement sometimes goes wrong. In the stories above, Evelyn, Inez

and Gabriela experienced different kinds of 'othering' within their host families, doubly hurtful in the cases where the au pairs had expectations of being equal to, or part of, the family. In all three cases it is made clear to the au pairs that they are not similar enough to the host families; not Norwegian enough, not atheist enough, not hard working enough. Yet, the stories indicate that these are relatively superficial ways of othering. What appears to be the thread running through the stories is that the process of othering happens in the framing of the au pair scheme, where real similarities play little role in producing the relations between au pairs and their hosts compared to the imagined differences that come with being an au pair. In short, the stories about discomfort connected to household chores suggest that the au pair scheme rests on socio-economic differences where different work has different value, and household chores are low on the hierarchy of tasks. It is difficult for someone to be an equal within a family when she is given only the most denigrated work to do.

For my informants, a way of coping with the process of othering is thus to internalise the notion of a hierarchy of tasks. Annie Chan has argued that the inherent contradictions in the relationship between domestic workers and their employees in Hong Kong meant that demarcating between 'important' and 'unimportant' tasks became a way of maintaining an employer-employee relationship instead of one resembling family (Chan, 2005, pp. 519-20). In the stories above, doing household chores for money implies a degrading form of servitude, given some of the au pairs' pre-existing class affiliation. Childcare on the other hand requires pedagogical skill and affective investment – implying that the au pair is a trusted part of the family. When explaining to themselves and others why they become outcasts of the families or never enter on the inside, feel bad about their situation, fail in their tasks, and get fired or quit, au pairs can blame it on the nature of the tasks they were given. Thus they create a boundary between themselves and the work that makes their situation bearable, a boundary where the host family can fit on either side. This is different to Chan's

informants in the sense that the au pairs in my material did the labour of domestic workers, but did not necessarily *identify* as domestic workers. In the process of doing affective boundary work to maintain a distinction between themselves and the work – and the possibility of becoming a domestic worker – the work itself becomes the boundary object: the object which ‘exists at junctures where carried social worlds meet in an arena of mutual concern’ (Clarke, 2005, p. 50). In the analysis of Evelyn’s story we saw how domestic work is also racialised, and how reinforcing and re-enacting this racialisation might become part of the affective boundary work to explain failing as au pairs/domestic workers (see also Durin, 2015, on how au pairs in France use racialisation to differentiate themselves from domestic workers).

Another way of doing affective boundary work is for the au pair to draw the boundary between herself and the host family. In this case the work can be done without dealing with identity issues connected to class or race. Inez did not think of herself as a member of the family, nor did she expect to become one. This explicit distancing from the family where the au pair herself is contributing in the process of othering might be seen as an attempt to professionalise the au pair scheme. A consequence of this boundary work, however, is that the au pair might be ‘erasing’ her own personality in order to become less vulnerable to the affective investments and inevitable partings involved in au pairing, perhaps risking estrangement from the work, but also from herself.

#### **7.6. ‘It’s not much’ as affective boundary work?**

I want to stay with the concept of estrangement as I return to the title of this chapter, namely ‘it’s not much’. Given that au pairs do affective boundary work where hierarchies of class and race are being negotiated, what does ‘it’s not much’ mean? I believe that it can be seen as a negation of the extent of the work, but also as a strategy of distancing due to estrangement from the work. As noted in the introduction, host families hire au pairs primarily out of a want or need for a

domestic worker. Au pairs are more available and substantially cheaper than other domestic workers, partly because their labour is not counted as such – thus host families undoubtedly benefit from the au pair scheme. Au pairs might of course also benefit, but the fact that they are not paid properly means that those who arrive as work migrants have to affectively negotiate the low price (and value) of their labour, and that those who arrive motivated by cultural exchange have to affectively negotiate that they are not desired as family members but rather as 'workers'.

If host families are the ones primarily benefitting from the scheme, it might be the case that au pairs are estranged from the work they do, and 'it's not much' might be an attempt at expressing minimal affective and physical investment in the work. Au pairing is not framed as domestic work, and the statement could be read as a way of signalling that even though the labour looks similar to that which is done by domestic workers, au pairs do not identify as such. Thus, the affective boundary work involves distancing themselves from the work and thus also from domestic workers and so reproducing the racialisation of domestic- and care work. In a similar vein, au pairs who affectively distance themselves from the host family in an attempt to professionalise au pair work, nevertheless state that 'it's not much' and may still be imagining au pair work as something separate from low-status domestic work.

The material conditions set the scene for what and how affective work is done in the au pair scheme: the way it is being practiced suggests that it is a result of global economic inequalities. Regardless of who the au pair is, the role she enters in the private home requires affective labour. Living in a precarious and subordinate position doing low-status work within someone else's home, while negotiating the muddled yet restricted boundaries of the au pair scheme, means that au pairs do a significant amount of affective boundary work to deal with their situation. This labour, it seems, is the price of 'cultural exchange'.

## References

- Akalin, A. (2007) Hired as a Caregiver, Demanded as a Housewife: Becoming a Migrant Domestic Worker in Turkey. *European Journal of Women's Studies* 14(3), 209-225.
- Anderson, B. (2000). *Doing the dirty work?: the global politics of domestic labour*. London: Zed Books.
- Bikova, M. (2010) The snake in the grass of gender equality. In Isaksen, L.W. (ed) *Global Care Work*. Lund: Nordic Academic Press.
- Búriková, Z. (2015). 'Good families' and the shadows of servitude: au pair gossip and norms of au pair employment. In Cox, R.(ed) *Au Pairs' Lives in Global Context*. Hampshire: Palgrave.
- Chan, A. H. (2005) Live-in Foreign Domestic Workers and their Impact on Hong Kong's Middle Class Families. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* 26(4), 509-528.
- Cheever, S. (2003). The nanny dilemma. In Ehrenreich B. and Hochschild A. R. (eds) *Global Women: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. London: Granata Books.
- Clarke, A. E. . (2005) *Situational Analysis. Grounded Theory After the Postmodern Turn*, Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage.
- Cox, R. (2011). Competitive mothering and delegated care: class relationships in nanny and au pair employment. *Studies in the Maternal* 3(2).
- Durin, S. (2015). Ethnicity and the Au Pair Experience: Latin American Au Pairs in Marseille, France. In Cox, R. (ed), *Au Pairs' Lives in Global Context*. Hampshire: Palgrave.
- Eng, D. (2010). *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Fjell, T. I. (2008) *Å si nei til meningen med livet? En kulturvitenskapelig analyse av barnfrihet*, Trondheim: Tapir akademisk forl.
- Hegstrom, J. L. . (2006) Reminiscences of Below Stairs: English Female Domestic Servants Between the Two World Wars. *Women's Studies* 36(1), 15-33.

- Lan, P. (2003). Negotiating Social Boundaries and Private Zones: The Micropolitics of Employing Migrant Domestic Workers. *Social Problems* 50(4), 525-549.
- Liarou, Eleni (2015). 'Pink Slave' or the 'modern young woman'? A history of the au pair in Britain. In Cox, R. (ed) *Au Pairs' Lives in Global Context*. Hampshire: Palgrave.
- Macdonald, C. L. (1998) Manufacturing Motherhood: The Shadow Work of Nannies and Au Pairs. *Qualitative Sociology* 21(1), 25-53.
- Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (2013) *Migrasjon 2012. Fakta og analyse*. Retrieved 15.12.2013 from <http://www.udi.no/Global/UPLOAD/Publikasjoner/Aarsrapport/2012/Aarsrapport2012/Aarsrapport2012.html>
- Rodríguez, E. G. (2008) Reading Affect - On the Heterotopian Spaces of Care and Domestic Work in Private Households. *Historical Social Research* 33(1), 252-277.
- Sollund, Ragnhild. (2010) Regarding Au Pairs in the Norwegian Welfare State. *European Journal of Women's Studies* 17: 2, 143-160.
- Statistics Norway (2011). Barnetilsynsordninger, 2010. Retrieved 11.12.2012 from <https://www.ssb.no/utdanning/statistikker/kontantstotte> .
- Svendsen, S. H. B. (2014) *Affecting change? Cultural politics of sexuality and 'race' in Norwegian education*. Doctoral dissertation, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim.
- Weeks, K. (2007) Life Within and Against Work: Affective Labor, Feminist Critique, and Post-Fordist Politics. *Ephemera* 7(1), 233-249.
- Wetherell, M. (2012) *Affect and Emotion*, London: Sage.
- Øien, C. (2009) *On equal terms? An evaluation of the Norwegian au pair scheme*. Oslo: Fafo.

## 8. From intimate relations to citizenship? Au pairing and the potential for (straight) citizenship in Norway<sup>15</sup>

This chapter explores the potential for formal and informal citizenship through the relations that au pairs or women in au pair-like situations engage in. The issue of citizenship in au pairs' host nations is complex. The au pair scheme, itself, is not designed for migration, yet many au pairs consider the possibility of staying on after their two-year contract runs out (Cox & Busch, forthcoming). This situation suggests that au pairs often approach the issue of formal citizenship, but do so in roundabout ways. In this chapter I focus on the gendered and intimate aspects of citizenship (Lister, 1997; Plummer, 2003; Yuval-Davis & Werbner, 1999), wherein citizenship is both something that can be 'had' and something that can be performed relationally. I explore the possibilities of formal and informal citizenship through various forms of relationships, both inside the au pair scheme and after au pairing. I discuss and explore the concept of intimate citizenship (Plummer, 2003) and use it to shed light on narratives from in-depth interviews with 15 current or former au pairs in Norway. Of these au pairs, only three stated that they wanted to go back home after the end of their contract. All of the others were considering options for staying on or had already done so. I explore au pairing here as a migration route and ask the following overarching question: What can au pairs' narratives about work, migration and intimate relations teach us about formal and informal citizenship?

Au pairs have to negotiate the roles of both 'family member' and 'employee' in their host families, and this often creates problems (Stubberud, 2015). At its best, however, the two-year stay with the host family supplies au pairs with language skills, a social network, secure living and the chance to set aside money while they consider options for remaining in the country. In the interviews, au pairs'

---

<sup>15</sup> The article will be published in the book *Paid Domestic Work in a Changing Europe. Questions of Gender Equality and Citizenship*, edited by Gullikstad, Kristensen and Ringrose (forthcoming).

relationships with current and future employers were portrayed as only one aspect of the relational work they put into preserving or acquiring a residence permit or future citizenship status. Stories of partners or potential partners cropped up in the interviews when the decision or ambition to stay in Norway was discussed, and this is the starting point for what I will be exploring in this chapter.

Through the interviews with my informants, it became clear that their options for staying in Norway were closely intertwined with their personal and intimate relationships, and their narratives around these intimate relationships had a gendered form. In general, relationships with host families, friends and partners are pivotal in au pairs' lives, either because au pairs' formal citizenship rights depend on their host family or because they rely on their personal network to carve out a life in the host country during or after au pairing. Au pairs from outside the European Union (EU)/Schengen Area – third-country nationals – who want to remain have the options of studying, finding skilled work or filing for family reunification.<sup>16</sup> Au pairs from the EU/Schengen Area<sup>17</sup> might want help finding work or flat hunting, or might simply want to ground their sense of belonging, or informal citizenship, in a social network or a partner. In many – if not most – of the interviews, stories of love interests cropped up in relation to the au pairs' plans or ambitions to remain in Norway.<sup>18</sup> In the stories below, au pairs' heterosexuality appears to be a condition for the narrative, and in the analysis

---

<sup>16</sup> In 2012, 54 per cent of the 810 former au pairs who returned to Norway received student visas; 6 per cent received working visas; and 40 per cent returned on a family reunification visa (statistics from the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, retrieved via personal communication 15.11.2013).

<sup>17</sup> People from the EU/Schengen Area are not formally part of the au pair scheme because of current migration rules. EU/Schengen nationals have to register upon arrival in Norway, but do not have to declare their work; those who work as au pairs are not required to use UDI's standardised contract, which third-country nationals must use. Those of my informants who came from EU/Schengen countries nevertheless self-identified as au pairs, and many also used UDI's au pair contract or travelled through an agency that used a version of the same contract.

<sup>18</sup> I have not interviewed Filipina au pairs in Oslo, but if I had done this, it seems likely that other kinds of social networks, beyond the possibility of finding a partner, could have played a more substantial role in the narratives of finding ways to stay in Norway.

that follows, I will explore heterosexuality as a way of gendering citizenship in practice.

As Lucy Williams argued, 'Laws regulating migration are often highly gendered... Gender ... shapes the social meaning migration has for the individual as a member of their specific social group and it shapes the perceptions of the migrant by outsiders' (2010, p. 21). The gendered nature of the au pair scheme is reflected in terms of both visa applicants – 98 per cent of all applicants to Norway are women (Øien, 2009, p. 22) – and the gendered housework and carework au pairs are supposed to carry out. The fact that au pairs are conceptualised as a 'members of the family' or 'cultural exchange' is also highly relevant to the way in which the scheme is understood in the public sphere, and important to the intimate relations between au pairs and their host families. However, the gendered domestic labour au pairs perform is often at odds with this conceptualisation. The au pair scheme allows for a specific form of temporary work migration for women who would otherwise have few options for living and working in the host nation, and it provides a relatively affordable basis for migration for both third-country nationals and EU/Schengen citizens by providing au pairs the chance to learn Norwegian and familiarise themselves with the country.

The au pair scheme is only occasionally analysed as a migration route (see for example Dalgas, 2014; Pérez, 2015; Tkach, 2014). In this chapter, I look at some of the procedural and intimate aspects of this form of migration, which is not, in fact, intended as a migration route. Nevertheless, two years is ample time for au pairs to get acquainted with the country and language, and to consider options for staying. Au pairing is intended as cultural exchange for foreign nationals between the ages of 18 and 30, who work for Norwegian families doing 'light housework' for a maximum of 30 hours a week for two years. In return, the au pairs receive free board and lodging, Norwegian classes and monthly 'pocket money' of around 600 euros (before tax). In 2010, around 1,500 third-country

nationals acquired au pair visas, and almost 400 of these re-applied for a working, student or family reunification visa in 2012.<sup>19</sup> This indicates that the au pair scheme is, to some extent, used as a migration route, making it an interesting case study for exploring questions of formal and informal citizenship.

In the discussion below, I approach au pairs' considerations of the possibility of future formal citizenship in the host nation. I understand the *nation* as a stand-in for a more specific physical location where a future is imagined. I use the concept of *intimate citizenship* (Plummer, 2003) to capture relational routes to formal and informal citizenship rights in the imagined community of the nation (Anderson, 2006), and focus specifically on the way in which au pairs' narratives often rely implicitly on the 'heterosexual contract' (Butler, 1999; Wittig, 1989). This seems to produce heterosexuality as a precondition for some fantasies of formal and informal citizenship, which, in the case of au pairs, takes the form of replacing the host family as providers of citizenship with husbands as the imaginable route to formal rights and informal belonging. The 'family'<sup>20</sup>, in either of these forms, is thus a key symbolic structure as well as a material condition for au pairs' negotiation of potential formal and informal citizenship. Heredity and family lines are crucial components of everyday conceptions of national belonging, and becoming 'part of the family' in a literal sense through marriage is a way for au pairs to acquire both legal and affective citizenship rights in the nation (Fortier, 2008). This suggests that the relationship between formal and informal citizenship and the significance of intimate relations for these forms of citizenship are crucial for my analysis of the au pairs' narratives. In the following section, I will discuss how key concepts of citizenship relate to the au pairs' stories, with a special emphasis on formal, informal and intimate citizenship.

---

<sup>19</sup> Personal communication with the UDI, 15.11.2013.

<sup>20</sup> In the analysis I discuss 'au pairs', 'host families', 'host mums' and 'host dads'. My use of these terms does not imply that I believe their description of the relationships they refer to is in any way unambiguous. Rather, they attempt to create what they describe, as pointed out by Gullikstad and Annfelt (forthcoming).

### 8.1. Formal, informal and intimate (heterosexual) citizenship

*Citizenship* can be understood as formal rights and obligations connected to temporary or permanent residence in a particular place, as captured in modes of governance, rights and duties, as well as lived experiences, cultural knowledge, participation and belonging (Bosniak, 2001; Eggebø, 2012; Halsaa, Roseneil, & Sümer, 2012; Lister, 1997; Lister et al., 2007). Citizenship is always constituted in relation to its opposite. Au pairs are a highly diverse group of people who have different formal and temporal citizenship rights upon entering Norway, depending on their home country, as well as different resources to negotiate informal and relational citizenship, both during and after their stay. No contemporary exploration of citizenship, Nira Yuval-Davis argued, can be complete without looking at the changing ways in which people's intimate relations, family relations and networks of friends and acquaintances, as well as their gender, affect the way in which they *do* citizenship (2010, p. 123). Yet, in addition to this, the material analysed here requires attention to not only the fluctuating meanings of citizenship, but also the complementary concepts of formal and informal citizenship (Bauder, 2008).

*Formal citizenship* denotes the right to legally reside in a nation, either temporarily or permanently. As argued by Williams, the right to reside for those not born as residents is calculated based on the 'worth' of an applicant, and this 'worth' must be demonstrated and earned 'through attachment to an existing member ... of the state, or through prior [labour] experiences' (Williams, 2010, p. 76). With this right to reside come other rights and responsibilities connected to the welfare state. With regards to *informal citizenship*, I draw on Harald Bauder's definition of *citizenship* as a form of capital in Pierre Bourdieu's sense, and informal citizenship as a dimension of cultural membership in a national community connected to practices of identity and belonging (Bauder, 2008). Au pairs and other migrants thus have to gain 'access to territorially defined cultural codes and conventions and [be] able to enact place-particular habitual

performances' – in addition to learning the language – in order to have full access to informal citizenship (Bauder, 2008, p. 324).

While the concepts of formal and informal citizenship are useful for addressing access or lack of access, either to reside in a particular nation/place or to gain work through knowledge of local codes and conventions in job applications, they do not help us theorise or conceptualise the processes that are involved in giving, taking or acting out citizenship. Formal/informal citizenship does not take into account gendered, intimate and relational aspects, nor is it particularly useful for addressing the intersection between the private and the public realm of individual life or the social relations between people that often mediate the individual's relationship to the state – which has been a concern in feminist perspectives on citizenship (Eggebø, 2012, p. 51).

A way to conceptualise these relationships is to combine the notion of formal/informal citizenship with the concept of *intimate citizenship*. Intimate citizenship was coined by Ken Plummer (2003) and refers to the array of possible bodily and intimate practices and choices; intimate citizenship is a sensitising concept that 'describes how our private decisions and practices have become intertwined with public institutions and state policies' (Oleksy, 2009, p. 4). Both personal and intimate relationships are pivotal in au pairs' narratives of formal and informal citizenship, and attention to the intersection of the public and the private sphere in citizenship allows for a gender sensitive analysis of citizenship. However, Helga Eggebø (2012) pointed out that scholars such as Plummer tend to discuss already presumed members of the nation when discussing various forms of intimate citizenship. In her thesis on marriage migration, Eggebø merged the insights conceptualised by, for example, the concept of intimate citizenship, with attention to the inside and the outside of the nation. She argued that:

*The citizenship literature includes contributions questioning both the distinction between the inside and the outside of the nation state, and the public/private distinction. Nevertheless, hardly any contributions have sought to make a clear*

*conceptualisation of citizenship bridging both these distinctions... Combining perspectives from these two sections of citizenship scholarship exposes the fundamental and inextricable link between public and private concerns and the porousness of the borders that separate the inside and outside of the nation-state. (Eggebø, 2012, p. 53)*

Studying au pairs with attention to citizenship requires a conceptualisation of both potential aliens who lack formal citizenship rights (or will lack such rights in the future) and persons who are legally permitted to reside in Norway but may lack informal citizenship through social and cultural belonging. By combining the concepts of formal/informal citizenship and intimate citizenship, my aim is similar to Eggebø's in the sense of simultaneously drawing attention to a public/private distinction *and* the inside/outside of the nation-state. The wide range of personal and cultural resources, formal migrant statuses and material resources make au pairs and the au pair scheme interesting cases for studying the intersections between formal rights and obligations, informal belongings, the private and the public sphere, and the intimate, personal and relational – which is where au pairs seem to have the greatest amount of agency and are most likely to gain formal and informal citizenship.

Here, heterosexuality plays a central role. I have already noted that heterosexuality appears as an unspoken condition in the au pairs' considerations of future formal and informal citizenship. This condition should not be read as an effect of national regulations; homosexual marriages are equally effective for securing formal citizenship in Norway. Nor should it be read as a mere effect of the informants' self-presentation as heterosexual women. Rather, it is constitutive of a cultural order in which heteronormative family arrangements structure citizenship symbolically (Ahmed, 2006; Berlant, 1997; Nagel, 2000). When birth rights are out of the question, sex is a site that one can invest with optimistic attachment to the nation, through the hopes of becoming someone else's family – granted that the sexual relation imagined takes a socially

celebrated form, most often heterosexual marriage (Berlant & Edelman, 2014). In such cases, sex is invested with an optimism that both confirms the structures of power and salvages desire from the ever-present threat of becoming subversive that it entails (ibid.). This mode of regulation is intrinsic to 'sexual freedom' in Western countries, which should be understood as a specific form of sexual regulation to the extent that it is built into state policies (Mühleisen, Røthing, & Svendsen, 2012).

## **8.2. Analysing cultural narratives of intimacy**

The different ways in which possibilities for formal and informal citizenship are addressed by au pairs are explored through analysis of 15 qualitative in-depth interviews with 18- to 32-year-old current or former au pairs from Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe, living in Norway. In the interviews, I was interested in the informants' thoughts and plans for the future; when I asked about this, issues of rights and belonging surfaced, most notably through stories of partners or potential partners. The narratives analysed below shed light on questions of formal and informal citizenship through intimate relations: Marian 'queers' her relationship to her boyfriend in protest to her host mum's invasive involvement and acquires informal and temporary formal citizenship on her own terms. Imelda's story shows how the host father can become an imaginable spouse through the heterosexual contract and the struggle to bring together various plans and desires. Sonya's story illustrates the limits of national belonging as excluding Muslims, making her work hard to signal informal citizenship through cultural belonging and being a 'family member'. Finally, Paulina's story of becoming independent from her host family illustrates how unfulfilled expectations of informal citizenship can be met by boyfriends, rather than host families.

When analysing their stories, I tried to keep the 'whole' of their narratives in mind (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). Yet, I perceive the stories of my informants less

as individual tales and more as living, collective narratives that appear as legitimate ways of framing life events (Johansson, 2005). These narratives are circulated in the informants' societies, and the act of framing events through culturally familiar narratives might – in some cases – allow the storyteller to create or imagine agency. I see agency here, 'not necessarily connected to intentionality or to dramatic actions that change the present' but rather as something that 'can be found in how people understand the temporality of how one thing leads to another (causation) and what is possible' (Gunaratnam, 2013, p. 250; see also Greenhouse, 1996). The stories below touch upon broader issues of migration, domestic work, intimate relations, citizenship rights, belonging and agency, but are connected through a narrative of citizenship through heterosexual intimacy. I now turn to the informants' stories to explore these narratives further.

#### **8.2.1. Queering independence**

At the time of the interview, Marian (32) had a student visa and was working part-time while living with her fiancé, a Norwegian man she had met whilst au pairing. She had migrated from a country in South-East Asia<sup>21</sup> in order to provide for her children. She had worked as an au pair for two years, and her host mum had encouraged her to start dating. Yet, according to Marian, she had gotten a little too involved in her dating projects. Marian explained:

*[Host mum] knows all about my dates (laughs). I was out dating, and she was the one who set up my account at [dating website] (laughs). I couldn't do it myself, because it was in Norwegian! 'No, I'll set up an account for you, Marian, here's your username and password, and I want to know who this man you're dating is' (laughs)... The first time I exchanged text messages with a man in a different town ... the whole [family] went, and I met the Norwegian man, and [host mum] said 'If something happens, call the police and call me, and I'll come pick you up'.*

---

<sup>21</sup> To protect my informants' identities I have chosen not to specify the countries they travelled from.

Marian told me that the host mum had arranged everything, bought train and bus tickets for Marian to go on dates, and insisted on knowing everything. She had also set up a date with one of her own colleagues, and invited Marian's dates home to the family. Marian said:

*It was like she wanted to interview the men I dated, because she wants me to be happy. She wants me to have a proper Norwegian, kind man.*

Marian still ended up with a man she found on her own, a pensioner who was around twice her age. She described a loving relationship, and spoke humorously about him as 'my au pair', stating that he did most of the housework and cooking. According to Marian, the host mum was annoyed because the man did not fulfil her requirements:

*She wants me to find a man in his forties, and rich (laughs)! A steady job and rich, with his own house and.... But no. Once she told me that 'You're old enough to choose. Just make sure that he's kind'.*

Marian was not the only informant who spoke about host parents getting involved in their au pairs' dating, with several others mentioning similar forms of involvement and encouragement.<sup>22</sup> This might be unusual for au pairs; the host families of Zuzana Búriková and Daniel Miller's (2010) au pair informants in London outlawed dating. What, then, do the host parents' active involvement and encouragement here mean? It might be that the host parents were micro-resist strict migration policies (while, at the same time, micro-managing their au pairs' love life). Or it might be a sign of respect on behalf of the host parents, who acknowledge the au pairs' desire to have a social life outside the family that might include a partner. However, another possible interpretation is a form of nationalism; host parents want au pairs to become Norwegian because they deem it beyond question that the particular category of au pairs that Marian belonged to – ones who have travelled from a less affluent background in order to provide

---

<sup>22</sup> See Sabrina Marchetti (forthcoming) for a discussion of different forms of maternalism in female employers' relationships with their domestic workers.

financially for their families – should want to live in Norway. A partner may have been thought to help Marian ‘affectively assimilate’ (Myong & Bissenbakker, 2014) and become part of (the right type of ‘kind’ and ‘rich’) Norwegian culture through love.

When talking about her partner, Marian made a point out of mentioning that the reason they were together was love. ‘Love’, Eileen Muller Myrdahl argued, is ‘a requirement for the recognition as a national: it is the acceptable basis on which liberal subjects of the modern nation create new families’ (Myrdahl, 2010, p. 113; see also Flemmen, 2008; Eggebø, 2013; Fredriksen & Myong, 2012). If love is the idealised reason for marriage, legitimacy (not pro forma or arranged marriages) and parity between spouses through a common language, knowledge of each other and similar ages are imagined to be of equal importance (Flemmen, 2008), and marriages that break from these ideals are often rendered suspicious. Marian’s emphasis on love might have been a response to the host mum’s suggestion that she should find a ‘proper Norwegian kind man who is also rich’. In this statement, the host mum tapped into the question of how Marian should acquire formal citizenship in Norway as well as financial security. Yet, this does not always work out; the husband may refuse to participate in remittances or the couple may divorce (Dahl & Spanger, 2010). Furthermore, the host mum’s suggestion that the man should be rich could be read as an Orientalist (Said, 2001) assumption that inscribes Marian as a woman who is willing to trade sex for other goods (money, citizenship) in the heteronormative exchange, wherein younger, foreign women are imagined to be willing to make this exchange (Mühleisen et al., 2012).

During the interview, Marian appeared uncomfortable when talking about her host mum and her involvement in Marian’s dating. Yet she also seemed to have some strategies for dealing with this behaviour, which involved a form of queering of her relationship with the older man. By queering, I mean that she described her relationship in ways that explicitly departed from heteronormative

ideals, and seemed conscious of the fact that she was disturbing these norms through exposing them. The humorous comment that Marian's partner was her own 'au pair' could be interpreted as a reaction to the unequal distribution of power between Marian and the host mum, which was now reversed. Also, if Marian's presence in the former host family produced a situation in which traditional gender roles were reinforced through her cooking and cleaning, the comment also served to reverse these gender roles in her own household, in which Marian was providing financially for herself and her family back home while her partner was cooking and cleaning. She also emphasised her ability to adjust to a new and difficult situation and to secure a happy life for herself without the host mum's help. She had learnt the language, made friends, worked voluntarily to enhance her career options, found a partner on her own and started studying. All of this involved the acquisition of informal citizenship, as well as temporary formal citizenship through her student visa.

### **8.2.2. Marrying 'dad'**

The heterosexual contract also played into Imelda's story. Imelda (27) had recently migrated from a country in South-East Asia and was working for a single father with two children. She had a boyfriend at home whom she planned to marry, yet they seemed to disagree about the timing.

*I told him, um, I will get married after four years because after Norway I will go to another country [to work].... So he told me that after two years he already wants to have a wife ... but I told him to wait, because ... I have a dream for myself and my family, I want to pursue all my dreams. I want to set myself first before I get married.*

Imelda talked about her ambition to start a business after working abroad – yet she also wanted to be a stay-at-home mum. Her dreams for the future were, in other words, pulling her in two different directions. Nevertheless, she was clear about her ambition regarding her relationship with her boyfriend:

*I promised to my boyfriend that I would be back, because I love him and I know that he also love me.... You know what, long-term relationships are hard.... Trust is really important, not only love, but really, trust.... You can build trust if you really love the person. You really need to fight against the temptation. If someone would court me I'd just fix in my mind that I will not entertain him, I'll just focus my mind and my heart for my boyfriend.*

This comment suggests that staying faithful was something Imelda had thought through, perhaps because she did not find it altogether easy. At several points through the interview she mentioned women she knew from her own country who had married Scandinavian men, or she spoke in more general terms about this. The fact that this surfaced in the interview could mean that Imelda had experienced a real desire and need to 'fight against temptation' in her present life.

During the interview, she also spoke a lot about the host father. She greatly admired him for his business skills and argued that he might have chosen her as an au pair because they had a shared interest in business. At a later point in the interview, we talked about discrimination, and Imelda firmly stated that she had never experienced this in Norway. She illustrated with an example of how she thought equality played out in practical terms:

*There is no discrimination here in Norway, right.... I'll just give you an example. Because this is related to the au pair who got married to her host. Sometimes the au pair gets married with her host.... Here in Norway, even if you are rich or poor, you can marry each other.*

This quotation can be interpreted in several ways. Imelda's life was fraught with tension and she seemed to be struggling to bring together various plans and ambitions. Given that she appeared happy with her present life, which provided her with work, a sense of adventure and a stable family constellation, it would make sense for her to fantasise about remaining exactly where she was. In this fantasy, the host dad would become a stand-in for the possibility of a life Imelda desired. She pointed out how she and the host dad had things in common,

followed by an argument of how the society she was currently a part of did not judge people who married 'up' or 'down' in a class hierarchy, as illustrated by the example of the relationship between an au pair and her host dad. I interpret this as a roundabout way of saying that the host dad had begun to appear to Imelda as a possible spouse.

Imelda already had a kind of intimate relationship to the host dad through looking after his children, living in the same house and cleaning and cooking for the family. Every other week, the two of them were also, at least in principle, alone in the house. And although she spoke about him as the 'host dad', she seemed open to reinterpreting their relationship. This suggests that when citizenship is at stake, intimate relations slide; in this case, it seems as if the already vague relationship between Imelda and the host dad, which, at the time of the interview, appeared to be characterised by an employer/employee relation as well as a quasi-familial relation produced through the au pair scheme, became conflated with the fantasy of another kind of intimate relation. As noted above, the relation between the older, more experienced and privileged man and the younger woman who is dependent on him is a readily available cultural fantasy that contributes to constructing the heterosexual contract (Chow, 2002). In this fantasy, women achieve rights, possessions, skills or indeed citizenship via men (Mühleisen et al., 2012). Imelda, along with a few other informants who spoke of the host dad in similar terms, could have internalised this widely circulated fantasy in Western culture, wherein heterosexual capacity is a legitimate route to citizenship.

### **8.2.3. The limits of belonging**

Sonya (26) arrived as an au pair as a third-country national from Europe. She was Muslim, and this background became relevant in the interview through her description of her initially cautious self-presentation and her reluctance to 'come out' as a Muslim. In my analysis, I connect this to Sonya's ability to perform

informal citizenship in the intimate sphere and, by extension, gain formal citizenship in the nation, wherein she imagined herself as undesirable.

Sonya was highly motivated to stay in Norway after the end of her contract, and wanted to continue her university studies. She was, however, also open to the prospect of settling down with a Norwegian partner in the future. She explained that she had migrated as an au pair because:

*I wanted to visit Norway ... because I like skiing and biathlon, to watch it on TV. My favourite sportsmen are ... Liv Grete Poiree and Petter Northug [famous Norwegian skiers], and I... the reason why I wanted to visit Norway was not to go on holiday but maybe live and learn to get to know this country.*

Regarding her motivation, it seems that Sonya was expressing desire for Norwegian culture, and, in a sense, also performing a kind of informal citizenship, culturally. Winter sports, and the mentioned skiers, are extremely popular in Norway, and Sonya's mention of these aspects as part of her motivation to stay in Norway could be interpreted as a way of signalling informal belonging.

At the time of the interview, Sonya was working for a couple in which the host mum had a highly demanding job. As a result, contrary to most of my other informants, she described a closer relationship to the host dad. She categorised him 'not as a friend, but as an older family member, I think'. She gave an example to illustrate this:

*When I had a date, for example, he asked me 'Who is he and where are you going?' (smiles), but not seriously of course. But once he said 'Now I am your dad and I need to ask with whom you are going out with' (smiles).*

There are some gendered power dynamics at play here, evoked through notions of family, wherein Sonya is described by the host dad as his daughter. Sonya equated the host dad's policing of her dating activities with her expectations of an older family member confronted with a daughter's romantic explorations. Her

motivation for telling this story in the interview may have been that the host dad was discursively producing her as a family member. As her visa depended on her relationship with the host family, this might have been a reassuring confirmation of her role in the family.

Later in the interview, I asked her if there was anything she could not speak to the host family about. She stated that:

*I don't keep secrets. But on my [au pair] profile, at first, I wrote that I'm an atheist, because I think that maybe, um, I was going to Norway when it happened with Anders Behring Breivik, and I think that maybe the host family was a little afraid because there are many types of Muslims in the world, but when I came here, I told them that I was a Muslim, and now I tell it to everybody.... We are not like Arab Muslims, we don't pray a lot and don't wear hijab, we're like European people.... In the beginning I didn't speak a lot about my future because I was not sure that they like people who want to stay in Norway. But now I think it's ok, I speak about that too.*

In this quote, Sonya's Muslim background is portrayed as a disqualifier for finding both a host family and a partner – both of which are ways to achieve temporary or permanent formal citizenship. Sonya appears well aware of the racism, prejudice and marginalisation that disproportionately affects Muslims in Norway, and her mention of the terror attack on 22 July 2011 is an implicit reference not to the terrorist, but to the violence Norwegian Muslims were subject to before it was known that the terrorist was a white, ethnic Norwegian man (Auestad, 2013). The quote points to Sonya's worries that people might not like her desire to stay, specifically because she is a Muslim, and I interpret her cautious self-presentation as a strategy for bettering her chances for formal and informal intimate citizenship. This strategy also seems to have involved (re)constructing an image of the 'stereotypical Arab Muslims' who wear the hijab and pray a lot, and then distancing herself from this image by describing herself as rather 'like European people'. This could be interpreted as drawing a strategic

border around a nation that she wished to be a part of, by constructing others as outcasts. Sonya's worries and her desire to cast herself as different show how racism feeds directly into the way in which people imagine themselves as (potential) parts of a community or not (Fortier, 2008).

It is interesting that Sonya was so cautious about exposing her background when creating her au pair profile, and simultaneously so concerned with expressing belonging to a very particular form of Norwegian culture, namely winter sports. Her narrative suggests that informal citizenship must be carefully managed, especially by those who perceive themselves formally and culturally at the borders of the nation, and whose formal citizenship status depends on relationships with others. Sonya was hoping to access a more permanent form of formal citizenship, and her religion, culture and interests all played a part – along with her heterosexuality, which provided one clear, imaginable way for her to remain in Norway. Walking a tightrope between cultural similarity and difference led to this careful management of informal citizenship and expressions of belonging. In order to be perceived as an imaginable part of the nation to others – both her host family and potential partners – she underplayed her background in order to 'pass' as a family member in the broader sense of the word.

#### **8.2.4. Agency in informal citizenship**

Paulina (24) came to Norway from an EU country, meaning that her formal right to reside was not dependent on the host family. Her story highlights the significance of the transition from intimate relations with the host family to intimate relations with a partner, and how, even with formal citizenship rights, informal citizenship might be both desirable and necessary for securing a good life.

Paulina started au pairing for a family in a small town because she wanted a gap year between jobs, and explained that:

*I had been in Norway before and I thought it's a beautiful country and it's interesting to go here ... and I had also done some babysitting so I knew how to do it, and I think it's a good experience anyway to live in a family.... Maybe learn the language.*

She argued that her interest in Norwegian culture and language was the reason she migrated, and it appears that travelling as an au pair provided an easy and convenient way for her to do so. Her emphasis on her babysitting experience suggests that she initially expected this to be her main task in the family. Thus, whilst she was not formally dependent on the host family, she argued that it would be a 'good experience' for her to learn the language. This indicates that Paulina expected the host family to provide informal citizenship; through her relationship with them she believed she would gain access to Norwegian culture and language more easily and affordably than by settling down on her own.

However, au pairing did not turn out quite the way Paulina had expected:

*It wasn't an advantage for me to go to a host family where one parent is from my country because we spoke our language, not Norwegian.*

Furthermore, she was not able to go to language classes because her host mum needed her in the house. Her description of the workload indicated that her expectations outlined in the first quote were far from her experiences upon arriving in the family:

*I was pretty much always the one cleaning the house, doing the laundry and making dinner. The other kids were in kindergarten, so... yeah. I was taking care of the baby girl all day, and everything with housework.*

Paulina seemed to expect the host family to provide her with a sense of informal citizenship, whilst the host family expected a degree of help in the house that Paulina was not prepared for. Yet she described that, in the beginning of her stay, she did try to fulfil her host family's expectations. Mainly, she explained, she did

so because she had nowhere else to go, and no one to spend her spare time with. This changed when she met her boyfriend:

*I started my independent life (laughs)... I got to go out and go skiing, and ice fishing and everything. You know, do something that I expected to do with the family.... So then it got a bit tense [with the family] because ... I wasn't at home all the time [to] watch the kids whenever they wanted, so it became a bit... they didn't like it.*

There seems to be significant discrepancy between Paulina's description of her expectations of 'cultural exchange' and the host family's expectation of a worker. Paulina attributes her being fired to her 'independent life', which started when she met her boyfriend. This suggests, perhaps, a sense of dependency on the host family, despite having formal citizenship rights that were independent of her au pair job. Paulina was, after all, living in a relatively remote place in a foreign country, with no social network. Through her boyfriend, she gained other options when she was fired; she moved in with him and found other work with his help. Yet, job applications are full of cultural conventions. Would Paulina have got her next job had she not known who to get in touch with or how to write the application in the 'proper Norwegian way'? She did not specify her boyfriend's role in her decision to remain in Norway, but it seems likely that an intimate relation might have served as a shortcut for her to become acquainted with what Bauder (2008) called 'the commitment to imagined national behavioural norms, attitudes, and cultural conventions [that] distinguishes citizens from those migrants who are unable to express belonging' (Bauder, 2008, p. 325).

Paulina's relationships with her partner, his family and her other friends in Norway might have provided some shortcuts to informal citizenship, which she needed in order to remain in the country. What is interesting in Paulina's story is the transition from informal citizenship based on a 'family' relation with a limited amount of agency to another kind of more intimate informal citizenship with a greater degree of agency. When Paulina described her 'independent life', she

could have been talking about a kind of relationality that was more age-appropriate. In the relationship with her boyfriend, she had a greater amount of agency and equality than she had achieved in her relationship with the host family. Needless to say, however, this kind of informal citizenship with agency is only available to EU/Schengen citizens.

### **8.3. Promising intimacy?**

In the stories presented, the paradoxical nature of citizenship in the au pair scheme becomes visible; the scheme is not intended as a migration route, but often becomes precisely this for au pairs. As the au pair scheme only allows for a limited type of citizenship, my informants used strategies such as looking for work, enrolling in further education and dating in order to gain formal and informal citizenship. Au pairing could thus serve as a springboard to a life in Norway. However, au pairs are always dependent on others, be these host families or partners. My informants' stories underline that it is difficult for au pairs to succeed on their own, even with formal citizenship rights. The state of inbetweenness – between the state of citizen and alien, family member and employee – is a confusing space within which au pairs must manoeuvre rights and duties with limited amounts of agency.

I would add that this consequence of the au pair scheme is highly gendered; au pairs' relationships with host families are often fraught with tension and lacking in agency for au pairs, who do not necessarily fit either the scheme's image of a 'family member' or the host family's expectation of a domestic worker. One way to interpret the au pairs' relatively enthusiastic stories of dating could be that dating provided them a familiar space, wherein a more age-appropriate sense of agency was available as they were more likely to be *on par* with a partner than with a host family. In addition, intimate relationships held the promise of solving issues of formal and informal citizenship, as the narratives of Marian, Imelda and Paulina suggest – given that they were able to gain the right amount of informal

citizenship through expressions of cultural belonging (as Sonya's story shows). By implication, informal citizenship was something that could be gained, but also something that could be performed relationally.

Au pairing provides an interesting case for thinking about citizenship because of the compulsory gendered relationality involved. It relies on a family-based rhetoric in which au pairs lack agency by being constructed as 'family members' who perform live-in domestic work while their visas depend on their relationship with the host family/employers. The au pairs' stories of dating not only highlight the intimate and relational aspects of citizenship in the au pair scheme, but also reveal an apparent gradual symbolic transition from 'daughter' to 'wife' through a cultural kinning process that has its natural conclusion in family reunification. The discourse of the scheme places the au pair in a symbolic family structure in which she is figured as a 'big sister'. This allows for her factual adulthood and labour capacities, while, at the same time, constitutes her as a child in relation to the host 'mum' and 'dad'. The symbolic position of a child functions as a de-sexualisation of the adult woman, at least within the walls of the household. Yet the au pair is not supposed to be a child. On the contrary, au pairs perform adult women's tasks in the household – tasks that are normally administered by the woman of the household and that are generally (still) constituted as primarily women's responsibilities in the heterosexual household contract. It seems, then, that the au pair is not a symbolic 'big sister' but an auxiliary wife. In this light, the 'big sister' label can be seen as an attempt to recruit the incest taboo to prevent the possibility of sexual relations between the au pair and the host dad (Phillips, 2006). It is quite evident that there is a high degree of concern for the ever-present possibility of this particular sexual relation (Cox, 2007). Many, if not most, au pairs report having minimal interaction with the host dad (Hess & Puckhaber, 2004). At the same time, reports of host dads' sexual abuse of au pairs circulate (Sunde & Isungset, 2013). The tension that this particular symbolic and practical relationship produces needs to be taken seriously. This is of political, as

well as analytic, importance. The practice of denying exactly how desirable this coupling can seem to both the man in the household and the au pair is likely to contribute to the current inability to address the problem of the sexual abuse of au pairs.

In this chapter, I have analysed au pairs' narratives. I will end by addressing the question behind the subheading above: 'Promising intimacy?'. While the tales of boyfriends and dating seem to have implied that these relationships provided the au pairs with a greater degree of agency than their relationships with host families did, family reunification through marriage also involves a form of intimate relational citizenship characterised by a potentially unequal situation of dependency. Au pairing as a migration route, in other words, remains an inherently individualistic project wherein it is up to each au pair (or woman in an au pair-like situation) to carve out a life for herself, in Norway or elsewhere. It becomes an individualistic project because it is not, in fact, regulated as a migration route. There is a sense of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011) in this tale, because formal citizenship is, in the end, always governed from above. And regarding informal citizenship, host families still have the upper hand, as there is no control mechanism or formalised punishment for denying au pairs access to informal citizenship – for example by making them work rather than attend Norwegian classes. Thus, despite the (sometimes) promising tale of agency and increased access to informal and (perhaps eventually) formal citizenship through intimate relations, au pairs' narratives are still shaped by immigration policies, conceptualisations of domestic work, racialisation and othering, all interwoven in the nitty-gritty fabric of the intimate sphere and loaded with the weight of 'family'.

## References

- Ahmed, S. (2006). *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Auestad, L. (2013). Idealised sameness and orchestrated hatred: extreme and mainstream nationalism in Norway. In L. Auestad (Ed.), *Nationalism and the Body Politic. Psychoanalysis and the Rise of Ethnocentrism and Xenophobia* (Kindle ed., pp. 41-60). London: Karnac Books.
- Bauder, H. (2008). Citizenship as Capital: The Distinction of Migrant Labor. *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 33(3), 315-333.
- Berlant, L. (1997). *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City. Essays on Sex and Citizenship*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Berlant, L. (2011). *Cruel Optimism*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Berlant, L., & Edelman, L. (2014). *Sex, or the Unbearable*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Bosniak, L. (2001). Denationalizing Citizenship. In T. A. Aleinikoff & D. B. Klusmeyer (Eds.), *Citizenship Today: Global Perspectives and Practices* (Kindle ed.). Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Búriková, Z., & Miller, D. (2010). *Au Pair*. Cambridge, Malden: Polity Press.
- Butler, J. (1999). *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Chow, R. (2002). The dream of a butterfly. In Y. J. Hwa (Ed.), *Comparative Political Culture in the Age of Globalization* (pp. 109-136). Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Cox, R. (2007). The Au Pair Body: Sex Object, Sister or Student? *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 14(3).
- Cox, R., & Busch, N. (forthcoming). Gendered work and gendered citizenship: Diverse experiences of au pairing in the UK. In B. Gullikstad, G. K.

- Kristensen & P. Ringrose (Eds.), *Paid Domestic labour in a Changing Europe*: Palgrave.
- Dahl, H. M., & Spanger, M. (2010). Sex workers' transnational and local motherhood: presence and/or absence. In L. W. Isaksen (Ed.), *Global Care Work*. Lund: Nordic Academic Press.
- Dalgas, K. M. (2014). Becoming independent through au pair migration: self-making and social re-positioning among young Filipinas in Denmark. *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*. doi: 10.1080/1070289X.2014.939185
- Eggebo, H. (2012). *The Regulation of Marriage Migration to Norway*. (Doctoral thesis), University of Bergen.
- Flemmen, A. B. (2008). Transnational Marriages - Empirical Complexities and Theoretical Challenges. *NORA*, 16(2), 114-129.
- Fortier, A.-M. (2008). *Multicultural Horizons. Diversity and the limits of the civil nation*. Oxon, New York: Routledge.
- Gullikstad, B., & Annfelt, T. (forthcoming). The au pair programme as 'cultural exchange'. The effects of the Norwegian au pair policy on gender equality and citizenship. In B. Gullikstad, G. K. Kristensen & P. Ringrose (Eds.), *Paid Domestic labour in a Changing Europe*: Palgrave.
- Gunaratnam, Y. (2013). Roadworks: British Bangladeshi Mothers, Temporality, and Intimate Citizenship in East London. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 20(3), 249-263
- Greenhouse, C. (1996). *A Moment's Notice: Time Politics Across Cultures*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press
- Halsaa, B., Roseneil, S., & Sümer, S. (2012). *Remaking Citizenship in Multicultural Europe: Women's Movements, Gender and Diversity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hess, S., & Puckhaber, A. (2004). 'Big sisters' are better domestic servants?! Comments on the booming au pair business. *Feminist Review*, 77, 65-78.
- Hollway, W., & Jefferson, T. (2000). *Doing Qualitative Research Differently*. London: Sage.
- Johansson, A. (2005). *Narrativ teori och metod*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

- Lister, R. (1997). *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives*. London: Macmillan.
- Lister, R., Williams, F., Antonette, A., Bussmaker, J., Gerhard, U., Heinen, J., . . . Gavanas, A. (2007). *Gendering Citizenship in Western Europe: New challenges for citizenship research in a cross-national context*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Marchetti, S. (forthcoming). Pity and gratitude. Negotiations around gender and citizenship between Filipino domestic workers and their employers in Rome and Amsterdam. In B. Gullikstad, G. K. Kristensen & P. Ringrose (Eds.), *Paid Domestic labour in a Changing Europe*: Palgrave.
- Mühleisen, W., Røthing, Å., & Svendsen, S. H. B. (2012). Norwegian sexualities: Assimilation and exclusion in Norwegian immigration policy. *Sexualities*, 15(2), 139-155.
- Myong, L., & Bissenbakker, M. (2014). Forstyrret kærlighed: Affektiv assimilation som nyt ideal for transnational adoption. *Social Kritik*, 137, 56-67.
- Myrdahl, E. M. (2010). Legislating love: Norwegian family reunification law as a racial project. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 11(2), 103-116.
- Nagel, J. (2000). Ethnicity and Sexuality. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 107-133.
- Oleksy, E. H. (Ed.). (2009). *Intimate Citizenships*. New York: Routledge.
- Pérez, M. A. (2015). The cosmopolitan dilemma: Fantasy, work and the experience of Mexican au pairs in the USA. In R. Cox (Ed.), *Au Pairs' Lives in Global Context*. Hampshire: Palgrave.
- Phillips, A. (Ed.). (2006). *The Penguin Freud Reader*. London: Penguin.
- Plummer, K. (2003). *Intimate Citizenship*. Seattle & London: University of Washington Press.
- Said, E. W. (2001). *Orientalism: vestlige oppfatninger av Orienten*. Oslo: De norske bokklubbene.
- Stubberud, E. (2015). 'It's not much' Affective (boundary) work in the au pair scheme. In R. Cox (Ed.), *Au Pairs' Lives in Global Context*. Hampshire: Palgrave.
- Sunde, I., & Isungset, O. (Writers). (2013). Herskap og tenarar [television series], *Brennpunkt*. Oslo: NRK.

- Tkach, O. (2014). Migrant au pairs in Norway: From multi-faceted work to prospects of settling down. In M. Pajnik & F. Anthias (Eds.), *Work and the Challenges of Belonging* (pp. 134-152). Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Williams, L. (2010). *Global Marriage. Cross-Border Marriage Migration in Global Context*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wittig, M. (1989). On the Social Contract. *Feminist Issues*(Spring), 3-12.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (2010). The 'Multi-Layered Citizen'. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 1(1), 119-136.
- Yuval-Davis, N., & Werbner, P. (Eds.). (1999). *Women, Citizenship and Difference*. London: Zed Books.
- Øien, C. (2009). On equal terms? An evaluation of the Norwegian au pair scheme. Oslo: Fafo.

## 9. Framing the au pair. Problems of sex, work and motherhood in Norwegian au pair documentaries<sup>23</sup>

This article examines two documentaries on au pairing in Norway. *Mammaranet* ('The Mummy Robbery') (Rommetveit, 2006) and *Herskap og tenarar* ('Masters and Servants') (Sunde & Isungset, 2013) depict au pairs as Filipina women who have left their children behind in order to earn money through au pairing in Norway, yet put themselves in situations in which they risk both labour abuse and sexual abuse from their host families. In this article, I examine these portrayals of the au pair scheme and au pairs in Norway, and ask: How do the documentaries represent au pairing? What do the problems connected to au pairing appear to be? How does the au pair feature in these representations? And what solutions to the 'problems' of au pairing are implicitly suggested?

The image of au pairing that is circulated in the Norwegian public sphere is ambiguous. While it is stated on the political and administrative level that the intention of au pairing is cultural exchange, this element seems largely insignificant to the practice of au pairing in Norway (Bikova, 2010; Sollund, 2010, 2012a; Tkach, 2014; Øien, 2009). Employment of au pairs is pitched in the media as a private solution for busy, career-orientated parents (see for example Borchgrevink, 2013; Energy Au Pair, 2014); yet, according to legislation, au pairs are in Norway on 'cultural exchange' and should only engage in 'light housework' and childcare for a maximum of 30 hours a week, in return for 'pocket money' of 5,400 NOK per month (UDI, 2014). In 2013, Norway issued 1,476 au pair visas, of which 86 per cent were issued to women from the Philippines.<sup>24</sup> However, these numbers do not incorporate au pairs from the EU/Schengen Area, who are not formally registered as au pairs. Thus, although the majority of au pairs in Norway

---

<sup>23</sup> The article is published in *NORA Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 2015, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 125-39.

<sup>24</sup> Personal communication with Minja Tea Džamarija at Statistics Norway, 15.12.2014.

seem to come from the Philippines, the relative number of Filipina au pairs might be much lower.<sup>25</sup>

While au pairs come to Norway from various places, including Europe, media representations tend to focus on Filipina au pairs. This is also the case in both *Mammaranet* and *Herskap og tenarar*, which I analyse here. The media generally depict Filipina au pairs as migrant workers, often with dependent children who were left behind at home, and with little or no interest in cultural exchange, and much of the media coverage concerns stories of abuse of au pairs in Norway.<sup>26</sup> The two documentaries I analyse here thus seem representative of the way in which au pairs are imagined in Norway. This image of au pairs, however, may be both overly negative and reproductive of a particular stereotype.<sup>27</sup>

The aim of this article is to closely analyse the two documentaries with attention to form and content, and to shed light on the politics of representation they exemplify. In the following, I present the films along with the methodological tool of ‘framing’. The films naturalise au pairs as Filipinas and focus on the themes of labour exploitation, motherhood and sexual abuse. I argue that the films use ‘global care chains’ to frame au pairs as self-sacrificing poor mothers on the one hand, and, on the other hand, both vulnerable and sexually available girls. I theorise this construction by drawing on the notion of ‘the exotic’ Oriental woman and colonial power hierarchies. In conclusion, I discuss these representations of au pairing and the figure of the au pair in relation to recent changes in au pair legislation, and argue that the films’ representations of

---

<sup>25</sup> From January to May 2014, the Au Pair Centre in Oslo was approached 158 times; only 55 per cent of these approaches were from, or concerned with, Filipina au pairs (Au Pair Center, 2014, p. 5).

<sup>26</sup> A newspaper search on “au pair” at Retriever.no within the publication dates of 01.01.2014 to 21.08.2014, revealed news stories on labour and sexual abuse, including reports from trials of host families (45), stories of successful Norwegian women who were previously au pairs (45), stories of successful Norwegian women who could “have it all” with the help of au pairs (26), stories of happy/well-adjusted au pairs or au pairs who had found new work or had become married in Norway (15) and stories depicting au pairs as a childcare solution for busy families (5).

<sup>27</sup> The focus in this article is the documentaries’ framing of au pairing, and not the practice of the au pair scheme or who and what au pairs really are. For excellent discussions of the practice of au pairing, see, for example, Sollund (2012), Cox (2015), and Búriková and Miller (2010).

problems and constructions of au pairs contribute to a certain cultural circulation of 'truths' that allow for discourses that favour closing the scheme to mothers and, eventually, to all au pairs from outside the EU/Schengen Area.

### **9.1. Material and analytical perspectives**

The documentaries *Mammaranet* and *Herskap og tenarar* represent important stories of the au pair scheme and au pairs in Norwegian society, and draw on and produce meaning in relation to the issue of au pairing. What follows is a brief outline of each film, and an analysis of the films through the analytical lens of framing.

*Mammaranet* ('The Mummy Robbery') is a 22-minute long documentary that was originally shown on Norwegian television (TV2) in 2006, about the former au pair Emmalyn. The company that produced the documentary is connected to the University of Bergen, and makes research-based documentaries. It draws on the work of Lise W. Isaksen (2001) and Marianne Hovdan (2005). The film follows Emmalyn, a Filipina woman in her mid- to late 20s, who left her 4-year-old daughter Hannah in the Philippines in order to become an au pair in Norway. The overall theme of the film, as suggested by the title, is criticism of Norwegian authorities' and host families' willingness to 'rob' children in the Philippines of their mothers through the au pair scheme. Hannah lives with her grandmother and extended family, and Emmalyn's au pair work earns the family enough money to build a new house, put food on the table every day and provide for Hannah's future. Au pairing, however, is hard, as Emmalyn's host family makes her work longer hours than her contract allows and assigns tasks that stretch well beyond 'light housework'. Despite these difficulties, Emmalyn remains in Norway and marries a Norwegian man. The film follows the couple as they travel to the Philippines, where Emmalyn sees Hannah for the first time in almost three years; this is depicted in an emotional scene in which a sobbing Emmalyn embraces a sceptical looking Hannah. The film ends with Emmalyn leaving again, but hoping

to eventually take Hannah to Norway through family reunification. The film relies heavily on voiceover to tell the story.

The documentary *Herskap og tenarar* ('Masters and Servants') is part of the documentary series *Brennpunkt* ('Focal Point'), televised by the national broadcasting corporation NRK. The series focuses on social critique and investigative journalism, and the hour-long programme on au pairs was originally shown in 2013. The film, guided by voiceover, follows Christy, a Filipina au pair in her mid- to late 20s who left behind her daughter Precious and fiancé Melvin in order to work as an au pair in Norway. She was allegedly taken to Norway against her will by her former host family, and, with the help of a lawyer, was pursuing a trafficking case against them. Meanwhile, Melvin and Precious' lives go on in the Philippines. Melvin talks about his sadness over Christy's absence and tearfully tells the local congregation about her struggles in Norway. Nevertheless, he and the extended family take good care of Precious. Various representatives who facilitated the au pair placement also feature in the film, including an au pair agency in Oslo and the Norwegian Embassy in Manila, and the documentary also includes scenes from a preparatory course for au pairs that was organised by Filipino authorities.<sup>28</sup> The Filipino community in Oslo plays a big part in the film, featuring in scenes of a Christmas party at which a group of female au pairs performs a dance, and the Miss Au Pair beauty pageant in the Catholic Church. The film cross-cuts between these events, Christy's story and interviews with anonymous au pairs<sup>29</sup> who talk about labour exploitation and severe cases of sexual abuse in their host families. The title of the programme, 'Masters and Servants', indicates that the explicit goal was to address unequal power relations in Norwegian society.

---

<sup>28</sup> The Philippine government banned Filipina migrants from working as au pairs in 1998—a ban that Norway, along with several other countries, did not respect (Stenum, 2010). The ban was lifted for Denmark, Norway and Switzerland in 2010.

<sup>29</sup> The nationality of these au pairs is not stated, but their accents suggest that not all are Filipina. The film, however, never mentions that au pairs come from other countries, so au pairs' "default nationality" is Filipina.

Here, I am interested in the way in which the films frame au pairs and the au pair scheme. The analysis is based on a close and critical reading with attention to both form and content, wherein the films' themes structure the analysis. In what follows I highlight and do a close reading of sections that appeared to be important in the films thematically and by nature of their repetition. These close readings function hermeneutically as a way of bringing out the entirety of the films (Gadamer, 1989). I also analysed sections with characters and stories that play key parts in building the main narratives of the films.

Visual representations 'both depend on and produce social inclusions and exclusions' (Rose, 2012, p. 17), and documentaries utilise specific ways of 'framing' reality. According to Mieke Bal, framing can involve numerous ways of presenting, shaping and making sense of an object, in practical and symbolic terms (Bal, 2002). In documentaries this involves choice of themes, characters, and focus on some problems and issues over others. For example, the use of voiceover might be one way of providing interpretations to the viewer, and cross-cutting between themes to make them appear connected might be another. Framing, and being framed, is politically saturated and might also refer to the power of some to represent others and their deeds, where 'some way of organizing and presenting a deed leads to an interpretive conclusion about the deed itself' (Butler, 2009, p. 8). I use the concept of framing to describe the films' particular constructions of the object: 'au pairs and au pairing in Norway'.

To portray au pairs and the au pair scheme, the two documentaries draw on established metaphors, stereotypes and conceptual frameworks that would be instantly recognisable to the imagined audience (here, the 'Norwegian public'), in order to make a 'credible, convincing and compelling' argument (Nichols, 2010, p. 109). In other words, what is analysed here are not people and practices, but the films' representations of au pairs and the au pair scheme.

The main subjects of both films are au pairs, the au pair scheme and the largely negative outcomes of au pairing. I investigate the apparent problems of au pairing, as depicted in the films, as well as the way in which the au pair features in the representations to make the documentaries' framing seem plausible. These questions open the analysis not only to the events in the films and the representations of the different actors, but also to what appear to be important issues in the au pair scheme, what the underlying premises of certain problems might be and what the consequences of the representations and implicit solutions to the problems might be (come). Before moving on to the film analysis, I will flesh out some themes that are particularly important to the films' framing of the au pair scheme.

## **9.2. Theoretical perspectives**

Both *Mammaranet* and *Herskap og tenarar* rely implicitly on the concept of global care chains in their framing of the au pair scheme; this suggests that critique of this concept is relevant to the analysis. The films also partly reproduce a sexualised image of au pairs. In this section, I theorise the connection between the domestic sphere, domestic work, sex and 'the exotic' in order to flesh out the films' peculiar constructions of au pairs as not only mothers, but also sexually available, exploitable girls.

### **9.2.1. Global care chains**

The concept of global care chains (GCC), as coined by Arlie Hochschild (2000), refers to 'a series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring' (Hochschild, 2000, p. 131). Hochschild draws on the work of Rhacel Parreñas, who analyses international divisions of reproductive labour, wherein:

*class-privileged women [in Rome and Los Angeles] purchase the low-wage services of migrant Filipina domestic workers, [while] migrant Filipina domestic workers*

*simultaneously purchase the even lower wage services of poorer women left behind in the Philippines. (Parreñas, 2001, p. 62)*

Hochschild builds on Parreñas work and assesses the impact of globalisation on care, arguing that globalisation has further contributed to lowering the value of carework (2000, pp. 143-144).

The GCC concept has been critiqued in different ways (see for example Baldassar & Merla, 2014; Lewis, 2006; Manalansan, 2006; Yeates, 2005, 2012). Yeates notes that GCC, despite its gender-neutral language, tends to be used in discussions of female migrants and traditional women's work, such as childcare and housework, which 'reinforces dominant sociocultural construction of care work as women's work' (2012, p. 145). She argues for a broadening of the concept to include a wider range of care services, because well-skilled workers who are not parents may still have other care obligations in their home country (Yeates, 2005, p. 10). More generally, this could be understood as a criticism of the very narrow understanding of motherhood that the GCC framework relies on.

Martin Manalansan (2006) offers a similar critique, arguing that studies like that of Parreñas (2001) too often privilege stories of migrant mothers over those of queer, single or male informants.<sup>30</sup> The implication of this, Manalansan claims, is that 'the work of the home, including caring for children, cooking, cleaning, and other domestic chores, is rendered in heteronormative terms', and that the GCC framework privileges the experiences of migrant women with children (2006, pp. 238-239). He furthermore argues that, within this frame of interpretation, Filipino men (and other third-world males) are 'pathologically prevented by cultural 'tradition' from participating in domestic affairs' (ibid., p. 240). In the film analysis that follows, I draw on these critiques, as they are relevant to the films' construction of the problems of au pairing.

---

<sup>30</sup> Both Manalansan and Yeates acknowledge that Parreñas's 2005 book, *Children of global migration*, is not subject to this criticism.

### 9.2.2. The exotic in the domestic

Au pairs feature in the documentaries as mothers, women who marry Norwegian men, or they feature as young exploitable girls. To make them 'fit' these categories, the films rely implicitly on gendered, classed and racial or ethnic social structures. In order to explore the meanings of au pairing in the films, it is necessary to understand that the au pair scheme is located as part of a historical colonial discourse in which domesticity denotes both a space and a 'social relation to power' (McClintock, 1995, loc. 773). Thus, the au pair scheme is located in a broader history of servitude, colonialism and slavery. Furthermore, sexualised stereotypes of au pairs circulate culturally (Cox, 2007), and, due to the unequal relationship between au pairs and host families, au pairs' control over their own bodies may, in practice, be limited (Anderson, 2000, p. 138; Sollund, 2012a).

Gargi Bhattacharyya (2002) notes that, while the construction of the domestic and the exotic went hand in hand in the colonial era, it remains relevant today, through 'the exotic' as the continued sexualisation of the abuse of power. She states that:

*the titillated gaze is enabled by material power and privilege, and the vulnerability to becoming the object of that titillating gaze comes from a lack of material power and privilege. However, it also assumes that the exercise of that exoticising gaze fulfils some need for the powerful [namely that] sex, or imagined sex, stands in here as an opportunity to make the exercise of power more acceptable and appealing.*  
(Bhattacharyya, 2002, pp. 105-106)

Bhattacharyya here argues that the process of exoticising has a therapeutic function for the holder of the gaze, in that it makes the abuse of power not only bearable, but also desirable. She furthermore argues that 'the desired object is your slave, your enemy, your absolute other' (ibid., p. 107), who is both a 'scheming temptress and hapless victim' (ibid., p. 113). She notes that trafficked women are constructed in these seemingly contradictory terms, arguing that

concerns about trafficking are part of ‘a larger narrative that fears all population movements’ (ibid., p. 114). Bhattacharyya (2002) and Anne McClintock (1995) provide a theoretical framework to discuss the meanings of trafficking and sexual/labour abuse as ways of framing the au pair scheme; I will now turn to the films to scrutinise their particular constructions of problems and implicated characters.

### **9.3. Framing problems: Displacement of care, trafficking and sexual abuse**

*Mammaranet* and *Herskap og tenarar* are both problem-orientated documentaries that aim to educate viewers about a topic of current interest in Norway. Although they were produced seven years apart, the films present the practice of au pairing similarly. The documentaries rely on ‘all knowing’, unseen voiceovers that speak directly to the viewer, providing additional information (Nichols, 2010, pp. 114-115). By enhancing the overall argument, the voiceovers encourage audiences to read the films in certain ways; in a subtle but authoritarian way, the voiceovers suggest how scenes and characters should be interpreted. In this section, I ask how the problem of au pairing is represented in the films, often *through* the voiceovers, and focus on the displacement of care and the seeming exploitability of au pairs, as these are key themes in both films. I analyse the way in which stories are told to construct au pairs and the au pair scheme as problematic, and map out what the particular focus on the displacement of care and exploitability might mean.

#### **9.3.1. Displacement of care**

Both *Mammaranet* and *Herskap og tenarar* follow Filipina au pairs who have migrated to Norway. Emmalyn and Christy’s motherhood plays a key part in the films, and their absence from their own children is portrayed as problematic. Through this particular construction of problems, the au pairs in question are primarily portrayed as mothers, and their migration, joys and sorrows are

interpreted within this frame. In the following, I argue that when the films use the frame of GCCs, a highly complex issue is reduced to specific ideas of what constitutes 'good mothering'.

In the introductory scenes of *Mammaranet*, Emmalyn proudly holds up her mobile phone with a picture of her daughter Hannah on it, stating that she migrated in order to provide for her, financially. The voiceover informs viewers that Emmalyn's family is dependent on remittances to buy food, and the camera cuts to Hannah, who lies on the floor sulking while her grandmother tries to feed her. The voiceover states that 'no one knows the price Hannah pays growing up without her mum'<sup>31</sup>, and continues by saying that one in every ten Filipino children grows up with absent migrant parents. It is not mentioned who cares for these children in their parents' absence. The next clip shows an interview with Emmalyn, who argues that Hannah is not like herself – always smiling and happy – but rather has a sad face. The film cuts to Hannah's unhappy face as she is being washed by her grandmother, to confirm this unhappiness.

In *Herskap og tenarar*, Christy buys Precious a doll for Christmas. The invisible reporter asks her if she finds it hard to look after other people's children when she could be looking after her own. Christy starts to sob, talking about her desire to secure Precious's future. Christy also cries when she is reminded of the triplets in the abusive host family, whose picture she still carries in her wallet. The voiceover states that Christy 'feels like she let them down, too'.

The scenes described above show that, as migrants, Emmalyn and Christy are primarily constructed as mothers who left the responsibility for caring for their own children behind in order to care for wealthier children in Norway. The voiceovers underline this displacement of care, pointing to the women's absence and the misery that follows this decision. The narratives are constructed around sympathy for the children who are left behind, and partly for the sobbing, self-

---

<sup>31</sup> All translations are my own.

sacrificing mothers who miss them. This narrative implies that the only acceptable arrangement of care is for a mother to physically care for her biological children. Regarding care, the films represent two interlinked problems: the displacement of care from the mother to supposedly less competent carers, and the corresponding 'bad care' exercised by the mother.

The first problem of 'less competent carers' is portrayed through the representation of Emmalyn and Christy's absence as problematic. Here, the childcare practiced by the grandmother and Melvin is implicitly constructed as inadequate. Nevertheless, these carers are shown feeding, bathing, brushing the teeth of and generally interacting with the children. In addition, Melvin is portrayed as a sensitive man who sings love songs to Christy and openly discusses the family's struggles. Yet Melvin, the grandmother and other carers' efforts are never acknowledged by either of the films' voiceovers, and the interpretation of these individuals as competent carers is subsequently discouraged. This could mean that care is perceived as *belonging* to the figure of the mother, rather than something that can be *performed* by anyone. Thus, the care shown by fathers, grandmothers and other family members is implicitly devaluated. Manalansan notes, in relation to so-called third-world fathers, that:

*[it] is not only ethnographically erroneous, it belies a particular kind of knowledge 'imperialism' [that] portrays third-world men as lacking the cultural knowledge to be authentic modern fathers. (Manalansan, 2006, p. 240)*

The problem-orientated framing of absent mothers as part of a global care network prevents the explicit framing of Melvin in *Herskap og tenarar* as a modern 'new dad' or even a 'superdad', who is not only present in childrearing, but also unafraid to show emotion (Kaufman, 2013).

The second problem concerns 'bad motherhood', combined with a prescriptive notion of what constitutes 'good motherhood'. Emmalyn and Christy exercise many types of care for their families in the Philippines; they budget and send

remittances, speak on the phone and online, and buy presents. Nonetheless, the voiceovers emphasise the children's suffering over the family's increased financial security. If care 'travels' with women, the long-distance care exercised by Emmalyn and Christy – such as mobile phone parenting and the sending of remittances – is not acknowledged as proper motherly care because it is not present and direct. Through the circulation of these ideas, the films place migrant mothers in a 'no-win' situation in relation to their children (Parreñas, 2005b). The films seem to advocate a normative and prescriptive version of motherhood, wherein housework and childcare are naturalised as women's work. At the same time, the films could easily have framed migration as a potentially positive re-arrangement of the families, and long-distance care as an alternative form of mothering (ibid., p. 325).

The choice to portray Hannah as a suffering child with an absent mother suggests a politics of representation that aims at raising Norwegian authorities' and host families' bad feelings about 'robbing mothers' from children. A more nuanced picture of 'abandoned' children could have been shown – one in which it would be clear that Filipino children with migrant mothers *or* fathers are slightly more likely to report being less happy, but that other factors, such as caregivers' mental health and family functioning, are much more important for children's well-being (Jordan & Graham, 2012). Furthermore, the vilification of migrant mothers by authorities and the media is likely to produce more suffering for the children than is the absence of one or both parents (Parreñas, 2002, p. 53). In other words, the films' narratives rely on a system of values in which present care for children is celebrated; this system of values seems to have limited room for interpreting au pairs as good (enough) mothers, due to their absence.

### **9.3.2. Sex(ualisation) in the au pair scheme**

Stories of abuse play an important part in both *Mammaranet* and *Herskap og tenarar*, and in the latter film these stories lend legitimacy to the documentary's educational and current affairs genre by adding a sense of urgency: au pairing is

portrayed as a form of domestic service with the risk of sexual abuse and trafficking. In the following, I look at how *Herskap og tenarar* constructs trafficking and sexual abuse as problems in the au pair scheme, and examine how this particular framing of feminine vulnerability impacts the conceptualisation of au pairs.

Human trafficking is a key theme in *Herskap og tenarar*, and is largely told through Christy's story. Accompanied by gentle piano music, she talks sobbingly about never having had time off, her own room or a cell phone, and not having been allowed to eat with the family or to leave the house. The voiceover states that Christy had worked for the host family when they lived abroad, and she had felt pressured to go with them to Norway because she owed them money. Eventually, she managed to flee with the help of a neighbouring au pair, and, through the film, we follow Christy and her lawyer as they work to put forward Christy's case as trafficking. Trafficking also comes up in a sequence in which the camera follows au pairs-to-be who attend a one-day preparation course in the Philippines. At the course, there are signs from organisations working against human trafficking, and the voiceover points out that 'Filipino authorities want to protect their girls'.

The next sequence shows the anonymous au pairs, who talk about unpaid overtime and elaborate task lists before gradually speaking out about sexual abuse from the host fathers. Their stories are cross-cut with scenes from a beauty pageant and a Christmas party: Christy and the anonymous au pairs talk about the abuse of labour rights, and one au pair states that her host dad was 'not looking for an au pair, but looking for a sex slave'. The next cut shows au pairs getting ready for the Miss Au Pair beauty pageant, putting on heavy evening make-up before joining in a shared prayer. The voiceover states, 'tonight, they are all princesses'. The women are shown dancing on stage, followed by posing in spectacular evening dresses. There is also another instance of similar combination of scenes. One of the anonymous au pairs twists uncomfortably in

her seat before beginning to cry, talking about the host dad's sexual abuse. This is followed by several other stories of au pairs being sexually abused by host dads. The next cut shows a group of giggling, young au pairs in matching clothes performing choreography to a popular Christmas pop song at a party at the Filipino Association.

The potential for trafficking, labour exploitation and sexual abuse in the au pair scheme is highlighted throughout the film, which depicts au pairs as vulnerable. Yet, despite the recurring theme of labour exploitation in both films, trafficking and sexual exploitation take over towards the end of *Herskap og tenarar*, detracting attention from basic labour regulations and controls that could have been implemented had the private home been understood as a workplace, and traditional women's work been understood as labour (Cox, 2012; Koren, 2012). Laura Agustín (2003) argues that Western governments' inability to apply normal labour rights – proper pay, regulated working hours and sanctions against employers who break rules, to mention a few – to traditional women's work devalues this work. She states that, '[t]he moral panic on 'trafficking' ... [keeps] the social gaze fixed on extreme cases while neglecting the more prosaic needs of the majority of migrant women' (Agustín, 2003, p. 392). In this sense, focusing on au pairs' labour rights by drawing attention to, for example, the lack of pay and the excessive working hours (when the goal is ostensibly cultural exchange), could both hit on a much broader argument about the status of traditional women's work in Norway and deal with the myth of au pairing as cultural exchange.

The cross-cutting between the beauty pageant and testimonies of sexual abuse is an important framing tool used in *Herskap og tenarar*. In Norway, beauty pageants generally receive little media attention, and young women's concern with traditionally feminine expressions of beauty is perhaps most widely associated with the so-called 'pink bloggers': girls and young women who write online blogs about beauty, fashion and aspects of their day-to-day lives –

generally perceived in the public sphere as immature, insignificant, naïve, uncritical and exploitable (Dmitrow-Devold, 2013). Despite a lack of research on this question in Norway, beauty pageants are likely to be viewed with suspicion and linked to the devaluation of women (Bloul, 2012). Thus, when the Miss Au Pair pageant features as part of the representation of Filipina au pairs in Norway, the au pairs are relegated to a largely frowned-upon version of traditional femininity.

If it were not for this cross-cutting, the beauty pageant could have figured as a form of socialisation or network building and underlined cultural specificity that is not uncommon in diaspora communities. The Filipinas in *Herskap og tenarar* have a strong homosocial community in Oslo, judging from various scenes of socialisation. This could mean that women in abusive host families have networks to draw on that enable them to leave at short notice.<sup>32</sup> Despite the stigma connected to beauty pageants, these can function as ‘re-integrative rituals for stigmatized identities’ (Bloul, 2012, p. 4). Filipinas, along with other au pairs with racially marked bodies, are highly visible as low-status domestic workers in the rich white neighbourhoods in which many of them live. Rachel Bloul claims that: ‘In diasporic communities around the world, beauty pageants become a means of re-affirming cultural uniqueness ... and cultural loyalty to the country of origin’ (ibid., p. 7). The beauty pageant may have a different meaning to au pairs than to ethnic Norwegian viewers; for the participants and the Filipina audiences, they offer a chance to meet others, have fun, strengthen their community and mark themselves as different from a Norwegian society that essentially devalues their work.

While it seems likely that the intention behind the cross-cutting was to highlight the stark contrast between different au pair experiences, the effect is nevertheless that the beauty pageant and stories of sexual abuse appear connected. Given the

---

<sup>32</sup> The Au Pair Centre in Oslo offers advice and some practical and legal help for au pairs, but does not provide emergency accommodation.

likely Norwegian interpretation of beauty pageants, as indicated above, the cross-cutting depicts au pairs as constructing themselves as sex objects by drawing on Orientalist stereotypes. This provides an implicit explanation for their sexual abuse, drawing on culturally circulated stereotypes that suggest that Asian women are either hypersexual, innocent and titillating, or submissive and attuned to traditional gender roles and servitude (Petersen, 2009). The au pairs appear to invest themselves in a version of traditional, seductive femininity, while their racial markings place them in an imperialist male fantasy of the self-sacrificing 'Oriental woman' (Chow, 2002; Pratt, 2004, p. 153). At the same time, the participants in the beauty pageant perhaps overstep the boundaries of au pairing by expressing too much femininity (Cox, 2007). In this light, the cross-cutting appears as a form of punishment, constructing the participants as highly feminised and 'ripe for exploitation' (Pratt, 2004, p. 55), while the culprits remain invisible.

Bhattacharyya points to how 'foreignness' has been eroticised and made into 'the exotic' through Europe's colonial history (2002, p. 104). Exoticism, or the eroticisation of a racialised 'other', both assumes power in the first place and serves a therapeutic function for the person in power, as it 'reworks cruelty and unfounded privilege as the more ambivalent position of desire, as if all this conflicted emotion was a product of psychic contradictions as opposed to class contradictions' (ibid., p. 106). These insights shed light on the structures of feelings that might make the particular cross-cutting and combination of scenes and themes in *Herskap og tenarar* appealing to a Norwegian audience. The effect of the cross-cutting – while likely unintentional – is a subtle play on desire by pointing towards sex(ualisation) as much as sexual assault. Considering the Orientalist and colonial legacy of the topic at hand, the mixing of the erotic through portrayals of traditional femininity with sexual abuse continues to eroticise unequal power relations by evoking the colonial masculine gaze.

The power relations that produce the 'exotic' au pair as an object of desire, as well as a subject to abuse, are reconfirmed through the cross-cutting. By focusing on the au pairs, rather than the abusive host families, the film directs audiences' questions and concerns about how these situations occur towards the au pairs (who are shown onscreen), rather than the abusive host families (who are not shown). Given that the film constructs the au pair scheme as problematic, the specific problem appears to be au pairs' availability and vulnerability, rather than the host family's exploitation. What might the solution be?

#### **9.4. Representing problems and problematic representations**

Above, I have analysed the ways in which the films frame au pairs and the au pair scheme. Both films present a largely negative image of au pairing in Norway, and while both begin by focusing on labour abuse, this focus is gradually replaced – even though labour abuse is the problem that au pairs are most likely to experience in their day-to-day lives. In *Mammaranet*, the focus shifts to the joyous but temporary reunion between mother and daughter as the final answer to the problem of GCCs. In *Herskap og tenarar*, stories of trafficking and sexual abuse, cross-cut with scenes from a beauty pageant, take over the focus and portray au pairs as young, vulnerable and sexually available. While the filmmakers presumably intended to draw attention to some of the most problematic aspects of au pairing, their particular framing of problems is, in itself, problematic.

In 'explaining' the way in which labour (and also sexual abuse) can occur, the films construct au pairs as poor mothers, always from the Philippines, who are desperate enough to put up with the conditions of au pairing. Filipina women thus become highly visible, ethnically marked stand-ins for poor women of the global south. Drawing on a GCC framework, the films favour stories of migrant mothers over other kinds of au pairs, and images of left-behind children and failing, yet self-sacrificing, mothers are combined with arguments that the au pair

scheme does not function as cultural exchange, because this could not possibly motivate mothers. Thus, the problem appears to be that the 'wrong' kinds of women become au pairs, and not that migration policy or au pair legislation is failing. Given that the films frame au pairs exclusively as Filipinas, it would be very easy from a legislative point of view to exclude Filipinas from the au pair scheme. Yet, as I pointed out in the introduction, far from all au pairs are Filipina, and au pairing, despite its obvious problem of ambiguous legislation, may also work well for host families and au pairs, alike.

The films' framing of au pairs also highlights that gender equality is not a viable frame of interpretation in relation to the global working class. It seems somewhat ironic that documentaries produced for a Norwegian audience should portray female breadwinners as insufficient mothers. If gender equality means women's increased participation in paid labour and men's increased participation in childcare, then the films' message seems to be that gender equality only concerns ethnic Norwegians, and that when poorer, darker women provide financial care while their male partners provide childcare, children are not properly cared for (Cox, 2011, p. 5; Manalansan, 2006).

The films depict the supposed poverty that lead Filipinas to migrate to Norway as au pairs as leading to labour exploitation, trafficking and sexual abuse. The main focus is on the vulnerability of au pairs to exploitation, while the host families stay invisible. I have argued that the technique of cross-cutting connects the beauty pageant and Christmas party to stories of sexual abuse, and implies that the au pairs, portrayed as both victims and highly feminised young, vain and sexually available girls, are partly responsible for their abuse. Using Bhattacharyya's concept of 'the exotic', I have showed how this particular construction draws on a colonial discourse of the 'Oriental woman', making unequal racialised power relations appear more attractive to the privileged – here the host families.

Although au pair legislation has not been my focus, I do find it worthwhile to point to a few changes that could be ‘explained’ through the films’ representations of problems. In 2012, Norway followed Denmark and closed the au pair scheme to parents, which means that some au pairs now lie about having children and risk having their visa retracted if they are discovered to be mothers.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the ‘problem’ of GCCs and the associated discomfort on behalf of Norwegian host families and authorities for ‘stealing mothers’ was ‘solved’ by closing the scheme to those who generated the most discomfort, but for whom the migration route may have been most needed. Furthermore, in June 2013, two months after *Herskap og tenarar* was televised, a quarantine was introduced for host families violating the scheme. Denmark has had a similar legislation in place since 2007, but, until 2011, only three families had been blacklisted, suggesting that the risk of deportation faced by au pairs who report their host families is too great (Stenum, 2011, p. 46).

Given that the quarantine does not seem to work, is another possible solution simply to outlaw au pairing, as proposed by the Ministry of Justice in May 2013 (NTB, 2013)? Scholars working in the field generally suggest that au pairing should be acknowledged as work (see for example Cox, 2015; Sollund, 2010; Øien, 2009) and a separate cultural exchange programme should be considered (Stenum, 2011). Yet arguments for unskilled labour migration are often met with claims that this would lead to social dumping and an ethnically based ‘underclass’ (NOU, 2008). The films, which naturalise au pairs as poor Filipina women and fail to point out that they depict only a small part of the big picture, fuel these fears.

The films frame au pairing in seemingly fixed unequal power structures along the axes of gender, ethnicity and class. They thus carve out a space to argue that au pairs are vulnerable labourers who are (naturally) exploited. As the films do not suggest that the global economic inequalities that produce this situation should

---

<sup>33</sup> Personal communication with Marit Vik at the Au Pair Centre in Oslo, 11.06.2014.

be dealt with, the framing of the problem also 'frames' a specific subject – the Filipina au pair – as the culprit by association. The portrayal of all au pairs as Filipina ethnicises au pairing and live-in domestic work. Through their visible presence in the films, Filipinas/au pairs are used as reminders of difference, global inequality and exploitation. The au pair is made the embodiment of 'multicultural intimacy', defined by Anne-Marie Fortier as 'the blurring of boundaries ... between Self and the Other that interrupts nation/al certainty' (2008, p. 12). What solution could be better than simply abandoning the au pair scheme and stopping the exploitation of poor women from the global south? The UK arrived at this conclusion in 2008, yet young women and men from EU countries continue to work there as au pairs under completely deregulated conditions (Busch, 2015). There is reason to think that this might also be the outcome in Norway, as long as some Europeans are economically deprived enough to work for 'pocket money', as the increasing number of au pairs from Spain suggests.<sup>34</sup> Yet, these workers would be less visible than Filipina mothers, and, in equality-orientated Norway, this would perhaps provide a new way of making existing unequal power hierarchies bearable.

---

<sup>34</sup> Personal communication with Marit Vik at the Au Pair Centre in Oslo, 11.06.2014.

## References

- Anderson, B. (2000). *Doing the dirty work?: The global politics of domestic labour*. London: Zed Books.
- Augustín, L. M. (2003). A migrant world of service. *Social Politics*, 10(3), 377–396.
- Au Pair Center (2014). Første Tertialrapport Au Pair Center 2014 januar til og med april 2014. Oslo, 15.05.2014.
- Bal, M. (2002). *Travelling concepts in the humanities: A rough guide*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Baldassar, L., & Merla, L. (2014). *Transnational families, migration and the circulation of care: Understanding mobility and absence in family life*. New York: Routledge.
- Bhattacharyya, G. (2002). *Sexuality and society*. London: Routledge.
- Bikova, M. (2010). The snake in the grass of gender equality. In L. Widding Isaksen (Ed.), *Global care work*. Lund: Nordic Academic Press.
- Bloul, R. A. D. (2012). Ain't I a woman? Female landmine survivors' beauty pageants and the ethics of staring. *Social Identities*, 18(2), 3–18.
- Borchgrevink, R. (2013, April 30). Derfor har jeg au pair. *Bergens Tidende*. Retrieved from [http://www.bt.no/meninger/debatt/Derfor-har-jeg-au-pair--2887625.html#.U3yTyfl\\_tWo](http://www.bt.no/meninger/debatt/Derfor-har-jeg-au-pair--2887625.html#.U3yTyfl_tWo).
- Búriková, Z., & Miller, D. (2010). *Au pair*. Cambridge, Malden: Polity Press.
- Busch, N. (2015). When work doesn't pay: Outcomes of a deregulated childcare market and au pair policy vacuum in the UK. In R. Cox (Ed.), *Au pairs' lives in global context*. London: Palgrave.
- Butler, J. (2009). *Frames of war*. London: Verso.
- Chow, R. (2002). The dream of a butterfly. In Y. J. Hwa (Ed.), *Comparative political culture in the age of globalization* (pp. 109–136). Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Cox, R. (2007). The au pair body: Sex object, sister or student? *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 14(3).

- Cox, R. (2011). Competitive mothering and delegated care: Class relationships in nanny and au pair employment. *Studies in the Maternal*, 3(2).
- Cox, R. (2012). Gendered work and migration regimes. In R. Sollund (Ed.), *Transnational migration, gender and rights*. Bingley: Emerald.
- Cox, R. (Ed.) (2015). *Au pairs' lives in global context*. London: Palgrave.
- Dmitrow-Devold, K. (2013). "Superficial! Body Obsessed! Commercial!" Norwegian press representations of girl bloggers. *Girlhood Studies*, 6(2), 65–82.
- Energy Au Pair (2014). Informasjon for familier. Retrieved from <http://www.energyaupair.no/family-information/>.
- Fortier, A.-M. (2008). *Multicultural horizons. Diversity and the limits of the civil nation*. Oxon, New York: Routledge.
- Gadamer, H-G. (1989) *Truth and Method: Second Edition*. London: Sheed & Ward
- Hochschild, A. R. (2000). Global care chains and emotional surplus value. In A. Giddens & W. Hutton (Eds.), *On the edge. Living with global capitalism*. London: Vintage.
- Hovdan, M. (2005). *Au pair in Norway. A qualitative study* (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Bergen, Bergen.
- Isaksen, L. W. (2001). "Kommer din praktikant også fra Litauen?" Om nye løsninger på gamle problemer. *Tidsskrift for kjønnsforskning*, 2.
- Jordan, L. P., & Graham, E. (2012). Resilience and well-being among children of migrant parents in South-East Asia. *Child Development*, 83(5), 1672–1688.
- Kaufman, G. (2013). *Superdads: How fathers balance work and family in the twenty-first century*. New York: New York University Press.
- Keskinen, S. (2013). Antifeminism and White Identity Politics: Political Antagonism in Radical Right-Wing Populist and Anti-Immigration Rhetoric in Finland. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 3(4), 225-232
- Koren, C. (2012). *Kvinnernes rolle i norsk økonomi*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Lewis, G. (2006). Imaginaries of Europe: Technologies of gender, economies of power. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 13(2), 87–102.

- Manalansan, M. F. (2006). Queer intersections: Sexuality and gender in migration studies. *IMR*, 40(1), 224–249.
- McClintock, A. (1995). *Imperial leather* (Kindle ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Nichols, B. (2010). *Engaging cinema*. New York, London: W.W. Norton.
- NOU (2008). NOU 2008: 14 Samstemt for utvikling? Hvordan en helhetlig norsk politikk kan bidra til utvikling i fattige land. Oslo: Utenriksdepartementet.
- NTB (2013). Mener Faremos au pair-forslag ikke er nok. Retrieved from <http://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/mener-faremos-au-pair-forslag-ikke-er-nok/a/10103142/>.
- Parreñas, R. S. (2001). *Servants of globalization: Women, migration and domestic work*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Parreñas, R. S. (2002). The care crisis in the Philippines: Children and transnational families in the new global economy. In B. Ehrenreich & A. R. Hochschild (Eds.), *Global women*. New York: Holt.
- Parreñas, R. S. (2005a). *Children of global migration: Transnational families and gendered woes*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Parreñas, R. S. (2005b). Long distance intimacy: Class, gender and intergenerational relations between mothers and children in Filipino transnational families. *Global Networks*, 5(4), 317–336.
- Petersen, L. M. (2009). *Adopteret - Fortællinger om transnational og racialiseret tilblivelse*. (Doctoral thesis). Aarhus Universitet, Aarhus.
- Pratt, G. (2004). *Working feminism*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Rommetveit, A. (Writer). (2006). Mammarant [Documentary]. *Dokument 2*. Bergen: Univisjon.
- Rose, G. (2012). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Sollund, R. (2010). Regarding au pairs in the Norwegian welfare state. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 17(2), 143–160.

- Sollund, R. (2012a). The essence of food and gender and the embodiment of migration. In R. Sollund (Ed.), *Transnational migration, gender and rights* (pp. 77–98). Bingley: Emerald.
- Stenum, H. (2010). Au-pair migration and new inequalities. In L. Widding Isaksen (Ed.), *Global care work*. Lund: Nordic Academic Press.
- Stenum, H. (2011). Abused domestic workers in Europe: The case of au pairs. Brussels: European Parliament, Directorate General for Internal Policies, Policy Dept. C: Citizens' rights and constitutional affairs.
- Sunde, I., & Isungset, O. (Writers). (2013). Herskap og tenarar [Television series], *Brennpunkt*. Oslo: NRK.
- Tkach, O. (2014). Migrant au pairs in Norway: From multi-faceted work to prospects of settling down. In M. Pajnik & F. Anthias (Eds.), *Work and the challenges of belonging* (pp. 134–152). Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- UDI (2014). Au pair permit. Retrieved from <http://www.udi.no/en/want-to-apply/au-pair/au-pair-permit/?c=phl>.
- Yeates, N. (2005). Global care chains: A critical introduction. In *Global migration perspectives* (pp. 1–19). Global Commission on International Migration.
- Yeates, N. (2012). Global care chains: A state-of-the-art review and future directions in care transnationalization research. *Global Networks*, 12(2), 135–154.
- Øien, C. (2009). On equal terms? An evaluation of the Norwegian au pair scheme. Oslo: Fafo.

## **Appendix 1: Long interview guide**

### **Core questions**

- *Can you tell me about why and how you came to Norway as an au pair?*
- *Do you know the reason your host family wanted an au pair?*
- *Can you tell me a bit about your relationship with the host family?*

### **Personal information**

- Age
- Nationality
- Time spent in Norway as an au pair/domestic worker
- Other migratory experiences
- Education and work experience in the home country
- Family in the home country
- Immigrant status

### **What has been left behind in the home country?**

- What kind of home has been left behind? With whom did you live?
- What were your reasons for leaving?
- Can you describe your home? Your house, street, city, country?
  - o Do you often think about this place when you are here in Norway?  
How does thinking about it make you feel?
- Do you have any plans or thoughts for the future? Will you return to your home country, stay, or go elsewhere to work or do other things?
- Is there anything in particular you miss, or anything you particularly appreciate in Norway?
- What kind of housework did you use to do in your home country? Who does this work now?
- How does the nature of the work and the carrying out of the work differ from the way you do it now?

## Work

- Do you have a contract? What does it say (is it possible for me to look at it)? Are your tasks written in this contract, and would you say it is being followed or not?
- What are your working hours?
  - o How many hours every day? Do you have days off? What does your contract say? Do you get your days off, or does it happen that the family asks you to work on your days off?
- What constitutes an ideal working day?
  - o Do you have any specific tasks you like to do? Do you get to do these often?
- What is a normal working day like?
- What were you told you were going to do? Do you think this description matches your day-to-day job?
- How do you perceive the work you do? Is it important? Would you change any of your tasks?
- Who would do the job if you weren't there?
- Who manages the work-related parts of the relationship with the host family/employers if there are more than one adult in the house?
- What do you prefer to do in your spare time?
  - o Where do you spend your spare time? Who do you spend it with? Do you ever go on holidays with or without the family? Abroad or in Norway?
- What do you think of the pay?
- Do you have any other legal or illegal jobs besides this?
  - o If not, would you want to work more? If yes, what is this job? How did you find it? Does your family know or mind?
- How were you recruited for the job?

- Did you find your family, or did they find you? Online or through other means? Why do you think you were hired for the job above other au pairs/domestic workers? Did you do anything in particular to attract Norwegian families? Do you think this is different to marketing yourself through the au pair-websites in other countries?
- Has the family said anything about why they wanted an au pair?
- What do you think about working in the private sphere of someone's home?
  - How do you feel about working so close to a family? Is there any discomfort involved from your side? Or the family's side? Do you think it would be the same to do the same type of work in for example a nursing home? How does the intimacy compare to the intimacy in living with your own family?
- How would you describe the ideal au pair-situation? (work, living arrangements, relation to the family, cultural exchange, pay... etc.)

### **Relations to the family/ies**

- How is the relationship with the host family?
- With who have you formed the closest bonds, if anyone? What is the nature of this bond?
  - Who in the family do you spend most time with? Do you enjoy it? What do you do together?
- Do you perceive the family as your equals?
  - What do you think it means to be someone's equal? Do you feel included in their lives? Do you include them in yours? Why/why not?
- Have there been any conflicts with the family? What happened?
- What do you think about the family hiring an au pair/domestic worker?

- Has the family had any au pairs/domestic workers before? Are these mentioned by family members?
- How do you think you've changed the dynamics of the family, if at all?
- How does the family arrangement compare to that of your home country?
  - o How does the living arrangements compare in terms of family members, sleeping and eating arrangements and so on? Time spent together? Who one talks to when one has problems?
- How was your place in the family you've left, compared to that of your host family?
- What does it mean to be "part of the family"?

#### **Thoughts on Norwegian society and (gender) equality**

- Why did you come to Norway?
- Who do you perceive yourself as replacements for in the homes in terms of the work you do?
  - o What kind of work does the mother do in the house? What about the father? Who spends the most time with the children? Who does the cooking, cleaning, maintenance?
- How do you think about your life in Norway in general?
  - o Are there similarities or differences compared to your home country? Likes? Dislikes?
- Have you had any particularly negative or positive experiences in Norway connected to your race/ethnicity, immigrant status, gender etc?
- My project is about Norwegian gender equality. What do you think about when you hear the word 'gender equality'?
  - o Do you think it's significant for the family that you are a women, with regard to the work you do, or do you think a man from your home country would and could do the same job? Other thoughts on gender equality?

## **Appendix 2: Short interview guide**

- How did you end up where you are now? What is your story?
- Can you walk me through a normal working day?
- What would an ideal day look like? Where would you be, who would you be with, what would you be doing?
- Why does your host family want an au pair?
- Who are the most important people in your life here and now, and why?
- Can you tell me about your home country and your life before you left for Norway?
- Where do you see yourself five years from now? Ten years? And how will you get there?

### **Personal information**

- Age
- Nationality
- Time spent in Norway as an au pair/domestic worker
- Other migratory experiences
- Education and work experience in the home country
- Family in the home country
- Immigrant status