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**Elisabeth Stubberud**

**FROM INTIMATE RELATIONS TO CITIZENSHIP?**

*Au pairing and the potential for (straight) citizenship in Norway*

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 (see Cox & Busch, this volume). 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’ 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.1 Au pairs from the EU/Schengen Area2 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.3 In the stories below, au pairs’ heterosexuality appears to be a condition for the narrative, and in the analysis 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’ on ‘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

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1 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).

2 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.

3 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.
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. 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’; 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.

**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

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4 Personal communication with the UDI, 15.11.2013.

5 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 (this volume).
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 (Berlant & Edelman, 2014). 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).

**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. The stories below thus 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.

**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 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’.

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

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6 To protect my informants’ identities I have chosen not to specify the countries they travelled from.
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. This might be unusual for au pairs; the host families of Burikova and 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 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

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7 See Marchetti (this volume) for a discussion of different forms of maternalism in female employers’ relationships with their domestic workers.
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.

**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.

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.

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.

**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


