From 'Cottage to Crèche' and Back:

An Examination of Childcare and Au Pairship in Ireland.

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Abstract

Ireland has changed in recent decades with increasing gender equality, women working outside the home, and the ongoing secularisation of society. However, these advances are accompanied by rising costs and a national shortage in access to formal childcare services. This dissertation addresses how Irish families cope and adapt in this context. Through ethnographic analysis, it explores the strategies that families employ to manage domestic and economic circumstances, interrogates how these approaches affect their parental and household needs, and evaluates their success in satisfying the requirements of the domestic unit. Through the specific lens of au pairs and host families in Ireland, this research examines how these relationships are politically and socioeconomically situated. This research considers the impact of childcare choices, such as the decision to employ au pairs, upon the most intimate kinship relations of the family, particularly mothering; it asks how these familial bonds are disrupted, maintained, or reshaped over time by the addition of an au pair into the family unit? This thesis investigates how boundaries and meanings of kinship are negotiated in circumstances where 'care' is commodified. I look at the tensions that arise in these interactions and the impacts of crossing or violating boundaries.

This study follows the journey of au pairs and host families from their first expectations through the construction of boundaries and the creation of kinship ties and possible breakdowns of such relationships. I examine the establishment and negotiation of boundaries within the household, by both the au pair and host family, using the theoretical framework of boundary work.

In addition, I address the dynamics of contemporary Irish kinship, focusing on the idea of 'fictive kinship,' to investigate the relationships that emerge between au pairs and host families. For both the au pairs and host families, tensions surrounding the experience of familial-like relationships highlights the complex nature of these dynamics. In this thesis, I follow my research participants as they navigate this fragile territory in the nexus of everyday practices, routines, and experiences.

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Prologue

In August 2013, I completed my Master of Science degree in Social Anthropology at the University of Edinburgh. I wanted to return home to Ireland and work for a few years before embarking on a PhD but at that time finding a job after a degree was difficult, especially in anthropology. I decided to get a TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) certification and relocated to Hong Kong to teach English to preschool-aged children before becoming an English Montessori instructor.

On my first day at the kindergarten school in Hong Kong, I turned up at 8 a.m. anxious and perspiring in the 37 degrees heat. The principal of the school welcomed me and led me to my classroom, where I could see a sign reading 'Miss. Miriam Teehan' had been affixed to the door. This made me smile because I had never had my name posted on a door and I felt important. The principal handed me the school's curriculum and timetable but as the children arrived at 8:45 a.m., I didn't have much time to study anything, but I knew I simply had to deliver an introduction lesson on day one. I was introduced to the other English instructors from England, the United States, and Macau. It was immediately striking that the Cantonese and Mandarin instructors had to wait in the classrooms while the English teachers, all female with the exception of one man from England, lined up at the entrance to welcome the students as they arrived at the school. Each classroom featured three teachers: one who taught English, one who taught Mandarin, and one who taught Cantonese, however only the name of the English teacher was shown on the front of the door. I was already feeling fatigued as I greeted every pupil with a smile and a 'good morning' before beginning my lesson. My cheeks started hurting from smiling so much. I was acquainted with Arlie Russell Hochschild's (1983) book (The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling) and her theory of 'emotional labor,' but it wasn't until this moment that I

understood what emotional labour felt like. I was then tasked with entertaining, teaching, and caring for a class of 30 three-year-olds. After a 9-hour day of work, I was emotionally and physically exhausted, and I worried how I was going to do this six days a week. This kindergarten was on the second level of a shopping mall in the west of Hong Kong, and I worked there for a year before moving to Central Hong Kong to work in a Montessori school.

In this Montessori every morning, like the previous preschool, the English teachers had to queue in a line to greet the children, but this time I also had to greet the parents, or in most instances the domestic workers. This is when I began interacting with female domestic workers, mostly from the Philippines and Indonesia. Each morning, they dropped their charges off at the Montessori and picked them up in the afternoon. When the children were upset, they cried for their domestic worker, and when a child felt unwell, we contacted the domestic worker rather than the parents to pick them up from school. The children and domestic workers seemed to have a close connection that they shared. However, I was not in a position at that time to conduct fieldwork and gather data to develop insights regarding their kinship-like relationship.

On Sundays, I frequently observed large numbers of women congregating on sidewalks, parks, railway stations, and other public places. To an outside spectator, these gatherings looked to be a lot of fun, with some groups enjoying picnics, fixing one other's hair, singing, dancing, praying, and laughing joyfully. I'd always wanted to join in, and one day while out on a leisurely stroll, I managed to strike up a conversation with a group of women who were having a picnic lunch in the park. We shared our stories about what brought us to Hong Kong, and the women explained that they were domestic workers from the Philippines. They shared stories about the

families that they worked for and about their families that they left behind. One mother in particular proudly showed pictures on her phone of her daughter's graduation from high school in the Philippines.

I didn't investigate or fully appreciate the complexities of domestic work at the time, such as the effects of migration, globalization, class, gender, racial bias, kinship, motherhood, and transnational families, to name a few. However, such encounters did fuel my curiosity to learn more about domestic work. After Hong Kong, I moved to Paris and met a small number of au pair women during my stay. Listening to their stories reminded me of the Filipino women telling their stories and experiences at the park. Au pairing and domestic work appeared to be very similar to me. Both sets of workers live with a host family, care for children, do housekeeping, and are paid very little. I wanted to investigate the classification of au pairing and what distinguished it from domestic worker. I wanted to gain insight into how au pairs and host families imagined au pairing and learn about the routine aspects of au pair employment, living with an au pair and to gain a greater insight into the idiom of being part of a family. I was interested in learning more about the intricacies of au pairing in my home country of Ireland. As a result, I began my PhD journey.

Chapter One: Introduction.

> *Hello, I'm looking for one advice. We are considering childcare options and an au pair sounds like a possible good fit (we think).*
>
> *We have a spare double room with an en-suite, we have two boys and another due the end of the year. We are more than happy to welcome someone into our house and become a part of the family.*
>
> *We would like help Monday to Friday from 2-7, parents would be in the house but working (on maternity leave first year of babies arrival). Boys are aged 3.5 and 2 and are in crèche 9-5. we would hope an au pair could help with boys collection from crèche (15 minute walk from house) and help with dinner and bed time. Also possibly help with baby before crèche collection or help with tidying boys rooms/ boys washing.*
>
> *The rest of the day outside 2-7 we assume au pair will study or do whatever they choose also weekends is au pairs time.*
>
> *What I'd like to know is this a reasonable ask or too much for an au pair to be asked to do?*
>
> *How much pocket money (seems to be how it's referred to, please correct me if this is not correct) should we should pay?*
>
> *Is there a specific time of year to take on an au pair? For example, if they are taking a course is it typically September they start?*
>
> *We live in Blackrock and are close to all amenities/transportation.*
>
> *Any advice/information/direction to good au pair agency etc greatly appreciated.*
>
> *Thanks in advance*

Figure 1:Post from a mother on an au pair Facebook group in Ireland.

This message is from a mother in Dublin, Ireland searching online for assistance on hiring an au pair. This post is intriguing for a number of reasons. First, Irish families struggle to balance childcare with current social policies such as maternity leave, as we will see in Chapter Two. Second, families struggle to figure out how much to pay an au pair since the government elected to adopt the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers in June 2011, implying that

au pairs should be regarded as domestic employees and entitled to minimum wage. Third, families publicise their desire for the au pair to become a member of the family. In this thesis, I embark on a chronological exploration of the interactions between au pairs and host families in Ireland. My objective is to delve into the fundamental dynamics that underlie the employment of au pairs, aiming to uncover the nuanced aspects of this relationship.

There is a scarcity of academic research on the subject of au pairs in Ireland, with the exception of historical studies that focused on Irish women in the nineteenth century leaving their homeland to work as domestic labourers in English households (Walter 2004; 2001; Cox and Busch 2018) and Irish women who were recruited by middle-class French families eager to emulate their "anglophile counterparts" (Durin 2015:157). Additionally, Macdonald (2010) highlighted ethnic stereotyping of Irish nannies in Boston. Furthermore, concerning au pairs in Ireland, Smith (2015) has argued that au pairs in Ireland endure exploitative conditions and that they serve as an affordable alternative to formalized childcare institutions that are in decline. Notably, 42% of Smith's participants came from non-EU countries and entered Ireland on student visas, with the largest proportion being Brazilian au pairs (26%), a trend in line with the literature on the south-north phenomenon of women from less affluent countries being drawn into the homes of more prosperous women in industrialized nations (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Parreñas 2001; Constable 2007). This means that the majority (58%) may not fit this pattern. My own findings suggest that many au pairs in Ireland tend to come from middle-class backgrounds regardless of their countries of origin.[1] Smith's focus centres on the exploitative and precarious

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[1] Au pairs from non-EU countries that are coming to Ireland have to obtain their own visas.

situation of au pairs in Ireland and their lived experiences. However, I agree with Smith's assertion that au pairs work in challenging environments, and that due to the unclear boundaries of the au pair role in Ireland and globally, au pairs of all backgrounds, regardless of class, gender, or ethnicity, are susceptible to power asymmetries and exploitation in their daily employment.

One key theme explored in the body of literature concerning au pairs is the ambiguous roles that au pairs often occupy, straddling the line between being treated as family members and employees (Cox and Busch 2018; Dalgas 2015; Búriková and Miller 2010). This ambiguity makes the au pair program an appealing and cost-effective labour solution for host families at the micro level and for host societies at the macro level (Dalgas 2015; Oien 2009; Stenum 2011; Hess and Puckhaber 2004; Yodanis and Lauer 2005; Isaksen 2010). Some scholars, like Hess and Puckhaber (2004), have even humorously noted that "big sisters" can make better domestic servants. This body of research sheds light on the intricate dynamics between host families and au pairs and how considering au pairs as family members can exacerbate the risk of labour exploitation, as paid work becomes disguised as (unpaid) familial obligations. In spite of this precarious position often associated with au pairs and other domestic workers when compared to host family members, a number of scholars have noted that the migrant domestic workers placed significant emphasis on establishing relationships with their employers characterized by mutual consideration and respect (Dill 1988; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). Some even expressed a preference for being treated as a part of the family they served (Parreñas 2001).

Moreover, Cox and Narula (2003) argue that au pairs find themselves in a unique predicament, where the expectation of integrating into the family is institutionalized as a mandatory requirement for participation in the au pair program. However, this raises questions about whether power dynamics are solely one-sided within the family or if au pairs employ strategies to assert their own power. Constable (2007) contributes to this discussion through ethnographic research, primarily on Filipina and Indonesian female domestic workers in Hong Kong. She highlights how power is expressed through 'hidden transcripts' (Scott 1990) in the daily lives of these workers. Hidden transcripts refer to the subtle language used by domestic workers to resist their oppression covertly. This research underscores the complexity of power, resistance, and discipline in the daily lives of domestic workers, challenging the notion that they are simply oppressed by those in power.

Contrary to the assumption that foreign workers, including au pairs, are recruited from disadvantaged backgrounds and are exploited, several studies indicate that some au pairs come from highly educated backgrounds. For instance, Búriková and Miller (2010) observed that some participants in their study had third level education. Cuban (2018) conducted research on highly educated Latin American women working as au pairs in the United States, highlighting how au pairing can serve as a 'gateway' into the United States. Within the European Union, au pair programs emphasize the pseudo-family relationship. This raises questions about whether au pairs and host families genuinely benefit from this symbiotic relationship, how au pairs fit into host families, and what host families expect from their au pairs. Concepts like relatedness (Carsten 2000) and the notion of closeness and social ties (Edwards and Strathern 2000) are employed in this thesis to comprehend these dynamics, emphasizing the idea that family is something people create rather than something inherent (see below).

This thesis underscores the formation of 'real' kinship relationships between au pairs and host families throughout their time of employment, with the possibility of these connections extending beyond the period of employment. However, it does not overlook scenarios where au pairs may be regarded as disposable, as observed by Amrith and Coe (2022).[2] Additionally, this thesis acknowledges instances where au pairs may prioritize their "real family," adhering to an essentialist notion of kinship rooted in blood and marriage, potentially overshadowing relationships that are formed outside of essentialist understandings of kin.[3]

This collection of research illuminates the complexities of au pairs' and domestic workers' experiences, questioning exploitation, and power dynamics narratives. It also emphasises the significance of considering these workers' educational backgrounds as well as the changing roles of women in the global workforce. It additionally emphasises the interaction of gender, employment, and family relations in analysing the au pair phenomena in different cultural and economic situations. This thesis contributes to the current body of research by examining chronological themes, including expectations, imaginaries, social, symbolic, and spatial boundaries, as well as boundary work and kinship, that surface in the dynamic journey of au pairing and hosting an au pair. It analyses how boundaries are shaped, sustained, contested, and the consequences of boundary breaches from the viewpoints of both the au pair and the host family. Notably, this thesis contributes to the ongoing discussion on kinship by asserting that expectations and boundaries intersect within the framework of kinship.

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[2] Amirth and Coe (2022) will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six.
[3] See theoretical framework below.

Au Pairing in Ireland

In 1969, the European Agreement on Au Pair Placement was signed by Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Moldova, Norway, Spain, and Switzerland (Council of Europe 1969). However, Ireland did not sign this European Agreement on Au Pair Placement and has still not signed. In 1991 during a Dáil Éireann debate Irish Fine Gael politician Fergus O'Brien asked Gerard Collins, then Minister for Foreign Affairs, when the Government would sign the European agreement on au pair placements. The minister's response was,

> The agreement provides for the protection of au pairs only within the acceding state. Ireland's accession would not, therefore, increase the protection of Irish au pairs abroad. The Departments concerned with the welfare of foreign au pairs in Ireland are satisfied that present provision for their welfare is adequate and do not favour the further legislative and administrative machinery which ratification of the agreement would necessitate. For these reasons it is not proposed to sign the agreement. Irish au pairs going abroad who consult my Department are advised to insist on a written agreement with their host families before leaving the country. While they are abroad they have, of course, available to them the protection and care of the local Irish diplomatic mission. Similarly foreign au pairs coming to the country have the protection of their own diplomatic missions here should the occasion arise.
>
> <div align="right">(Gerald Collins
1991)</div>

In this quote Collins (1991) indicates that Ireland does not need to sign the European Agreement on Au Pair Placements because Irish au pairs going abroad have the protection of the Irish state and au pairs that may come to Ireland should have protection from their country of origin. The government chose to ratify the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers in June 2011. Employees who work as a caregiver or cleaner in someone's home on a regular basis may not be called domestic workers; instead, they may be hired by an agency (agency workers are classified separately) or self-employed. Workers who are classified as self-employed are liable for their own taxes and, as a

result, are not covered by employment rights law. However, if you are an employer who hires someone to conduct household domestic work like as cleaning, childcare, or senior care and you pay them more than forty euro per week, you should register as an employer with Revenue (Workplace Relations 2019). Au Pairs in this study were paid more than forty euros a week, however it was not considered a wage, but rather pocket money. Because the concept of au pairing is ambiguous, host families that participated in this study did not register their au pair. Regardless of the Workplace Relations Commission suggesting that

> the use of designations such as Au Pair or other descriptions of arrangements between consenting parties do not in themselves mean an employment contract does not exist. A person performing a duty for another person in exchange for a payment would strongly suggests the existence of a contractual relationship.
>
> (Workplace Relations Commission 2019: 6).

Although there are contractual links among the participants in this study, most host families employed the AuPair World template contract[4], which is not linked with the International Au Pair Association (IAPA) (see below). Deputy Anne Rabbitte TD was appointed to the role of Minister of State with responsibility for Disability in July 2020. In May 2016, she was assigned to the Fianna Fáil front bench as Spokesperson for Children and Youth Affairs. During her time as Spokesperson, she introduced The Au Pair bill that provides a legal framework for au pairs in Ireland. In June 2016, Minister Anne Rabbitte created the 'Au Pair Placement Bill' and in July 2016 it was read for a second time to be debated by the Houses of the Oireachtas. This bill was defeated by vote and was not placed into legislation. Nevertheless, it is intriguing to

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[4] Host Families used the European employment contract template from the AuPair World website. This template projects the requirements of an au pair from the 'European Agreement on Au Pair Placement'. Refer to Chapter Three and four for more details on employment contracts.

observe how this Bill reflected the concept of au pairing and the expectations Minister Anne Rabbitte had regarding au pairing.

When the Au Pair Placement Bill was first suggested in June 2016, it reignited my curiosity about learning more about au pairs in Ireland. In June 2020, I first contacted Minister Anne Rabbitte to learn more about the 'Au Pair Placement Bill.' I sent her an email requesting a phone or video chat, but her assistant responded 24 hours later, stating that her calendar was jam-packed due to government votes, and recommended that I contact an Irish au pair agency. I chose to contact Minister Anne Rabbitte for the second time in 2022, six years later and four years into my research endeavour. I received a similar response from her secretary this second time, but with a clearer statement that this was not her domain and that I should contact Minister Roderic O'Gorman. Initially, this email puzzled me, leading me to question why this wasn't within her area, given that she had authored a Bill to be put into statute for au pairing. However, it is conceivable that addressing childcare matters in Ireland can be a sensitive issue for politicians to tackle, especially since Covid-19 brought heightened attention to the precarity of the childcare industry, whether official or informal.

What are the expectations of Minister Anne Rabbitte and the 43 government officials who voted in favour of the bill regarding au pairs and host families? The Au Pair Placement Bill states that au pairing is a temporary live-in arrangement for less than one year. After then, the Au Pair Placement Contract will either be terminated or extended with an Au Pair Agency. An au pair should participate in a cultural exchange with a host family and should liaise with an accredited agency (name not provided). It should be noted that agencies in Ireland receive their accreditation from the International Au Pair Association (IAPA). Their aim is to be the au pair community's most trusted and compassionate voice. They are dedicated to the promotion and

protection of au pairs and cultural exchange programs for young people. They inform and educate members, but also provide guidelines and orientation to au pairs, host families, government agencies, and other stakeholders. They promote the au pair concept across the world and assist national organizations in their efforts to expand and strengthen this cultural exchange program.

According to the Au Pair Placement Bill (2016), to be an au pair in Ireland one must be "(a) a citizen of the EU; or (b) be a non-citizen of the EU ordinarily resident in the Republic of Ireland with a student entry visa as prescribed by Ministerial Order under the Immigration Act 2004" (ibid: 4). The au pair needs to perform light domestic duties in exchange for hospitality, lodging and pocket money for no more than 30 hours a week, or 7 hours per day. Light domestic duties are defined as childminding, domestic chores, and other household duties. Nonetheless, it is not specified what 'light' domestic chores or household duties entails. The Bill states that host families and au pairs need to verify with an agency what domestic duties are acceptable. The "Au Pair Placement" is defined as "a cultural, learning and educational exchange" (The Au Pair Placement Bill 2016: 3). The host family should provide a written contract provided by an "accredited agency" and provide hospitality, lodgings and pocket money to an au pair engaging in this exchange programme. The host must include a part in the contract that outlines the au pair's specific responsibilities, a clause stating the host's commitment to provide board and lodging for the Au Pair, as well as the host's obligation to arrange an acceptable separate room or a suitable shared room at the Au Pair's disposal.

In section three of the Bill, it states that all power is given to the "the council" that is the "Au Pair Agencies Council of Ireland (APAC)" (2016). According to Kate[5], a founding member of the APAC Ireland council and the owner of an au pair agency in Ireland, the council no longer exists. However, this information is not reflected on their website, which was last updated in 2015. As is explained in greater detail in Chapter Three of this dissertation, Kate also mentions that au pair agencies can continue to operate as usual, albeit without the protection of "the council". "The council" was established by au pair agency owners in Ireland and are affiliated with the IAPA. Their objectives were: "to promote the au pair program to establish standards and best practice for the industry in Ireland congruent with international best practice to educate, inform and mediate with relevant stakeholders where required" (APAC Ireland 2014). Therefore, the Bill places all responsibility on agencies accredited by the "council" and IAPA. In terms of the Bill's expectations from au pairs it is clear that it views au pairs as cultural exchange students and not as employees as there is no mention of minimum wage. The "Council" (2014) defines an au pair as a young foreign person who is treated as a family member in exchange for certain services, such as a limited amount of light housework or help minding children. The au pair is usually given room and board and paid weekly pocket-money. There are specialist private agencies that can assist you in sourcing an au pair. The main objective of the au pair is to improve his/her language skills (APAC Ireland 2014).

Interestingly, "the council" also indicate on their website that au pairs in Ireland are entitled to minimum wage as per the WRC (Workplace Relations Commission) recommendations but at the same time state that au pairing is a cultural exchange programme and au pairs should receive 'pocket money'. What is expected of au pairs

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[5] For the sake of anonymity, Kate is a Pseudonym.

and host families is ambiguous, and the Au Pair Placement Bill and the council's projections are at odds. Some participants told me that they were unsure how much to pay their au pairs, and that some host families believed they had to pay their au pairs the national minimum wage in Ireland. As a result, some host families stopped hiring au pairs because the inconvenience of having a stranger in their home outweighed the financial benefits. However, most host families simply ignored the WRC recommendations and continued to practice in line with AuPair World and Facebook recruitment groups such as 'Au Pairs in Ireland'. Additionally, au pairs seem unaware of this bill or their entitlement to be paid minimum wage. They heavily rely on the information provided by au pair agencies. These businesses can shape the expectation for the experience as being part of the family, but they also shape an imaginary Ireland. Agencies romanticise Ireland and the au pair experience to entice au pairs. Much like the expectations of au pairs, host families' expectations are shaped by au pair agencies, social media, and word of mouth, but they are also motivated by a more affordable alternative to privatised childcare. The Au Pair Placement Bill (2016) distinguished au pairs from domestic workers by imagining and defining their role as part of a cultural exchange program. However, this Bill was defeated by a vote (43 politicians voted in favour of the Bill and 96 voted against the Bill), and the latest Irish government position defines au pairs to be domestic employees entitled to a minimum wage.

It should be noted that the term "domestic workers" is used in a number of academic publications to cover the employment of au pairs, nannies, servants, elder caretakers, house cleaners, and other paid workers in private households (Anderson, 2000; Parreñas 2014; McDonald 2011). Contrary to the rest of the EU, in Ireland au pairs are not legislatively included or protected as domestic workers with payment

entitlements. As a result of the ambiguous job responsibilities, family commitments, and minimal pay involved with au pairing, I do not use the term domestic workers as a replacement for au pairs. However, I am aware that the positionality of au pair employment determines the classification of domestic employees.

As noted, in the Irish Au Pair Placement Bill 2016 that au pairs carry out "no more than 30 hours per week, or 7 hours per day, light housework during the exchange, including childminding, domestic chores and other household duties" (data.oireachtas.ie 2016). Nonetheless, it was not specified in the bill what 'light' domestic duties entail. In contrast to recognized domestic workers whose role in the home is clearly defined and subject to employment law and rights, au pairs have little legal recourse for violation of their contracted hours or payment. As they are on a 'cultural exchange' as students learning English, they are not protected in the same way as registered domestic workers in Ireland. As previously stated, the Au Pair Bill was not enacted, and au pairs in Ireland should be registered as employees and regarded as domestic workers; however, host families in this study did not register as employees, and au pairs defined au pairing as part of a cultural exchange, at least at the start of their journey. The definition of au pairing and hosting on the Au Pair Bill as a cultural exchange is shared by both au pairs and host families.

Theoretical Framework

This thesis thoroughly explores a variety of theoretical frameworks and concepts, aiming to enhance our understanding of distinct stages in the experiences of au pairs and the lives of host families. These include anthropological investigations into imaginaries, social and symbolic boundaries, and boundary work. However, it is the overarching concept of kinship that unifies these concepts. Throughout this thesis,

kinship consistently emerges as a prominent focal point, offering valuable insights into how relationships are envisioned, established, developed, sustained, or disrupted.

Each chapter meticulously examines a particular stage in the chronological progression of au pairs and host families' experiences. Within each chapter, a thorough exploration of the pertinent literature ensues, involving an in-depth debate. Therefore, in this introduction, I will offer a review of the shifts in anthropological debates on kinship that have deepened my understanding of the concept of family. Furthermore, this thesis contributes to the existing literature on au pairing by attempting to untangle the nuanced boundaries between au pairs as a family member and/or an employee.

Kinship Changes in Anthropology

Morgan (1871) and Maine (1917 [1861]) are anthropology's early pioneers of kinship. They began their analysis of social structure with a comparative examination of concepts and practices of procreation—descent and marriage. For over a century, the study of kinship was at the very core of anthropology. Many important individuals in anthropology have built their reputations, at least in part, via their writings on kinship since Morgan (1871), ranging from Durkheim (1984 [1893]) to Levi Strauss (1969), Rivers (1968), and Malinowski (1930) to Radcliffe- Brown (1950) and Fortes (1949) (Parkin 1997: 135). Kinship was formerly so fundamental to anthropological thinking that Fox (1967:10) asserted that "kinship is to anthropology what logic is to philosophy or nude is to art; it is the basic discipline of the subject". Kinship studies were beginning to recognize the intricacies of relationships as well as the value of many forms of relationships, and societal stability was no longer the major goal in anthropology (Carsten 2000). And the study of kinship, whether evolutionary (Maine to Morgan), functionalist (Rivers, and Malinowski to Radcliffe-Brown and Fortes), or structuralist (Durkheim to Levi Strauss), had been linked to theories of social stability

in some way (Carsten 2000). Schneider (1995) points out that the shift away from kinship was part of a general shift in anthropological understanding from structure to practice and from practice to discourse.

Kinship, fell out of favour in anthropology throughout the 1970s and 1980s, because of critiques. Schneider's (1984) work, 'A Critique of Kinship Study,' highlighted how sexual procreation was made to be integral to the anthropological understanding of kinship rather than examining the many types of relationships of equal value to but separate from blood ties. This was voiced before by Needham (1971), who stated in his critique of kinship studies that the lack of theoretical breakthroughs is due to the poor conceptual frameworks of analysis, not a lack of data. However, around the close of the twentieth century, we see a resurgence of anthropological interest in kinship, which challenged the Western notions of kin through blood and marriage to provide alternative conceptual frameworks required by Needham (1971).

Yanagisako (2007) emphasizes that Schneider's examination of American kinship (1968) was critical in shifting anthropological thought. Schneider (1980) stated that in the American context, the family is understood to be established by natural principles and managed by standards that Americans regard as self-evidently natural. According to this viewpoint, sexual reproduction is the essential symbol that distinguishes the family as a unique entity different from other cultural entities. As a result, distinct terminologies are employed to distinguish family members from one another. A husband and wife with legal links have offspring with shared blood, changing the husband and wife into the roles of mother and father, with terminology that varies based on the distinctive social context. As a result, Schneider (1980) contends that a person is not naturally bound through marriage (affinity) but by law, and the connection can be dissolved but relatives by blood (consanguinity) have a common

substance that is the order of nature and cannot be terminated. Schneider (1984) put forth the argument that anthropologists, despite claiming to study kinship as a social phenomenon, had traditionally approached it from a biological and natural perspective. He demonstrated that kinship is fundamentally embedded in a symbolic system that is culturally constructed and subscribed to by most Americans. Schneider urged for a shift in perspective, suggesting that kinship should be understood not as inherently tied to blood relations, but rather as a symbolic construct shaped by cultural practices. In essence, he emphasized that kinship ties, whether based on consanguinity or affinity, are products of cultural processes rather than predetermined by nature.

Kinship lost prominence most notably to studies of gender (Carsten 2000). This was a component of a larger remaking of the nature of cultural and social life, which included the dismantling of anthropology's distinct realms of politics, religion, economics, and kinship. This remaking happened concurrently with what Schneider (1995:197) referred to as a "democratisation of the intellectual enterprise", in which concerns about social justice, feminism, and the civil rights movement played a critical role. Building upon Schneider's (1984) critique that sexual procreation serves as the central symbol of American kinship, Collier and Yanagisako (1987) put forth the argument that gender and kinship should be understood as interconnected cultural domains shaped by the act of sexual procreation. Their stance implies that gender and kinship should be approached as constituent parts of a unified field of study.

Kinship had resurfaced in the 1990s, and as Strong (2002: 402) states, "it seems that kinship is back in style," as kinship continually reinvents itself as a result of cultural processes. Kinship has resulted in being unravelled in order to re-establish itself. This is closely linked to Strathern's (1992) feminist work 'After Nature' and research on same sex couples (Weston 1991) and Carsten's (2000) collection of research on

relatedness. The idea that what is considered 'natural' and, consequently, how individuals perceive their relatedness to others in any ethnographic setting should not be assumed, underlines the significance of these studies. One essential genealogy of contemporary anthropology may be readily identified through its link to a core set of notions relating to reproduction, or "the facts of life" (Franklin and Ragone 1998: 2). Many contemporary discussions on kinship often commence with the notion of an antiquated concept of "nature," as observed by Franklin and McKinnon (2001), alongside the insights presented by Carsten (2000) in her edited collection 'Cultures of Relatedness'. According to Schneider's (1984) critique of early twentieth century kinship studies, which outsourced Euro-American ideas of natural relatedness to cultures that view the world differently, the foundational status of "nature" as the background on which human endeavour is both reflected and constructed began to dissolve. Like Schneider, Strathern's research in 'After Nature' (1992) holds a prominent position as a crucial reference for current field research, primarily because the definition of 'kinship' is not self-evident and tends to vary within different contexts (Strong 2002). Therefore, their discourses were crucial in influencing current research and are widely recognized. Strathern (1992) investigates the concept that kinship is a stable category in English culture, emphasizing its variable and context-dependent character. Building on her previous work, 'The Gender of the Gift' (1988), kinship, according to Strathern, is a process that is formed and negotiated via social relationships. Both Strathern and Schneider argue that the cultural and symbolic dimensions of kinship challenge the previously recognized genealogical and biological links.

In the realm of kinship studies, the concept of "Nature" has undergone a transformation. This observation, as pointed out by Strong (2002), signifies two

important aspects. Firstly, there is a lack of a definitive and fixed definition of "kinship" since its understanding varies depending on the specific context. Secondly, there is a recognition that a singular, comprehensive theory of kinship is unlikely to exist. This acknowledgment of ambiguity and situational specificity is reflected in contemporary kinship research, where scholars employ the term "kinship" while adapting and interpreting it in distinct ways (e.g. 'kinning' Signe Howell (2003)). The current understanding of kinship is often described as "postmodern" (Finkler 2000) or "nonmodern" (Carsten 2000:31; Latour 1930), reflecting the dissolution of the traditional division between nature and culture that had been a cornerstone of earlier kinship studies. This shift has been influenced by the growing focus within anthropology on new biomedical research, encompassing areas such as assisted reproduction technologies, body part transplants, cloning, and same-sex couples and adoption (Edwards et al. 1999, Franklin & McKinnon 2001, Franklin & Ragone 1998, Strathern 1992, Weston 1991, Howell 2003).

However, a considerable shift has happened in the concept of kinship, owing in large part to the downgrading of the concept of "nature." This shift has resulted in a less rigid and fixed notion of kinship. Feminist analysis, postmodern perspectives, and recognition of the impact of culture and social processes on kinship interpretations and practices have all contributed to the reduction in focus on nature-as-biology from the study of kinship. Researchers disputed the notion that kinship was limited to being defined by biological or genetic relationships, bringing the cultural, symbolic, and social aspects of kinship to the forefront. Shifting one's perspective can open up fresh perspectives on the dynamic and context-specific nature of kinship. Kinship is a social construct that is moulded by cultural, historical, and social variables rather than being a fixed and universal term. This acknowledgement of its adaptability and negotiability

recognizes that kinship is prone to change and adaptation in various circumstances. Anthropologists have obtained a deeper knowledge of the complexities of kinship as a social and cultural phenomenon by adopting a more flexible and contextual approach. The dismissal of fixed structural theories has resulted in a broader debate of kinship and its many forms across different cultures, eventually dethroning nature from the study of kinship.

The anthropological evidence presented in Carsten's (2000) collection serves as a significant example of challenging the primacy of 'nature' in understanding kinship. Carsten aligns with Schneider's argument that non-Western cultures establish kinship based on criteria beyond biological reproduction. However, Carsten diverges from Schneider by proposing a broader conceptualization of kinship as "relatedness," encompassing a wider range of relationships. In doing so, she critiques Schneider's delineation between social and biological kinship. Carsten's use of the term "relatedness" instead of "kinship" reflects a departure from the pre-existing analytical opposition between the biological and social aspects of kinship, which has been a cornerstone of anthropological kinship studies. By challenging or transcending the social and biological distinction, Carsten suggests that anthropologists can engage in cross-cultural comparisons and avoid cultural particularism. The convergence of ideas between Carsten and other authors in the book provides a platform for reimagining the scope of kinship studies and promoting a more inclusive and comparative perspective in anthropology.

In line with this, Edwards and Strathern (2000: 160-161) emphasize the multifaceted nature of human relationships, highlighting that "closeness" in kinship entails not only affective ties and mutual care but also acknowledges the possibility of distance. They argue that distant relatives, with whom interactions are infrequent and obligations

minimal, may not share intimate confidences. Moreover, Edwards and Strathern argue that biological and social ties are not the sole intersections in people's lives. They draw parallels between the bonds formed among friends or dissolved in disagreements within social groups and those that bind or strain kinship relationships. They also note the significance of biological connections, such as the impact of one's birthplace or mother tongue, which are immutable factors that echo the definitive transmission of substance at conception. The ideas put forth by Edwards and Strathern complement the reimagining of kinship as relatedness proposed by Carsten. Together, these perspectives emphasize the complexity and contextual nature of kinship, extending the analysis beyond biological and social ties to encompass diverse forms of relationships and intersections in human experience.

Similarly in my research, au pairs have the potential to establish meaningful connections with their host families and develop relationships alike to kinship obligations. They often form emotional attachments with the children and the host family as a whole. The obligations inherent in the role of an au pair can contribute to the mutual development of close bonds, particularly with the children and other family members. This connection is often nurtured through active participation in family activities and the shared experience of daily life. [6]

However, it is important to note that the daily rhythms, routines, and activities within the host family dynamic can also create a sense of distance between the au pair and the family. Some au pairs may intentionally create a barrier between themselves and the family, recognizing the temporary nature of their arrangement. Additionally, the

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[6] Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu (1977) provides a 'theory of practice' based on the quotidian, stating that 'the principal of this construction is the system of the structured, structuring dispositions, the habitus, which is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions' (1977: 72). These tendencies include culture and (where relevant) social position, and they typically exhibit themselves in the accumulation of wealth through time, such as from generation to generation.

obligatory nature of their work, rather than a voluntary commitment, can sometimes contribute to a sense of distance rather than closeness with their hosts. Similar dynamics of closeness and distance can be observed within host families as well. While au pairs have the potential to form strong bonds and kin-like connections with their host families, the dynamics of daily routines, awareness of temporary arrangements, and the nature of their work as an obligation can influence the degree of closeness or distance experienced in these relationships.[7] As a result, social practices, particularly those relating to families and relationships, reside at the intersection between large-scale power distributions and what people do to fulfil their symbolic and monetary purposes (Magee 2018). In the context of au pairs and host families, these dynamics illuminate the intricate interplay between individual relationships and broader societal constructs, shaping the nuanced fabric of family life.

As previously noted, the examination of kinship studies is context dependent. I will now shift from exploring kinship and biology to delving into the realm of kinship and friendship.

Strathern's (2020) book 'Relations: An Anthropological Account' investigates how kinship and friendship act as idiomatic terms. Kinship and friendship as idiomatic phrases represent far higher ideals and provides a wider context for a much more in-depth examination of the relationship—or, more precisely, the relations between those who are and are not biologically related. Miller (2017) stated previously that there has been a transition from kinship as a dominating language in the UK, represented in the practice of fictive kinship, to friendship as a dominant ideology, establishing a type of 'fictive friendship'. This idea argues that friendship has taken on a function akin to

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[7] See Chapter Six for an ethnographic account.

fictive kinship, in which people create intimate bonds and interactions comparable to those connected with familial ties. By referring to friendship as a form of "fictive friendship," Miller acknowledges the importance and effect of friendship in current social dynamics. This is consistent with Strathern's investigation of kinship and friendship as idiomatic expressions, which broadens knowledge of relationships beyond biological links and highlights the larger context and values they represent.

However, applying this method of thinking to au pair research becomes more complex. On the one hand, au pairs and host families can form a type of fictive friendships without the obligations that accompanies kinship and can 'give them [children] back' at the end of the day and retreat to their [au pair] bedrooms or leave the house. On the other hand, a sense of duty and obligations connected to kinship can make it difficult to 'say no' to their host family that treats them like family or in some cases host families may exploit the idiom of kinship to extract more labour from the au pair. In Chapter Six, an ethnographic narrative is presented, delving deeper into literature surrounding the terminology of fictive kinship and exploring kin-like relationships.

An additional element here relates to paid employment in which au pairs are paid to 'care' for children and behave somewhat as both a paid employee but also as a member of the family. Helping us understand this dynamic is the literature on care chains.

Au Pair Migration: Traditional, New and Global Women

Researchers adopting the 'Global Care Chain' perspective focus primarily on the movement of care labour and resources from economically disadvantaged nations to affluent countries. This process involves the hiring of women from less affluent nations as domestic workers to provide care in households in more industrialized countries (Parreñas 2001; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Parreñas 2012). The

consequences of this care transfer extend beyond the emotional sphere to encompass material implications for the families of migrant care workers. This frequently leads to women leaving their families in their home country to assume caregiving roles for middle-class families in wealthier nations, contributing to the associated idea of a 'care drain'. This phenomenon affects developing countries, resulting in a 'care deficit' as they export mothers and care workers (Hochschild, 2000; Isaksen 2010). The concept of a global care chain gains significance, especially in its impact on children that are left behind (Parreñas 2001). However, au pairs in this study did not have dependents in their home countries, and their decision to come to Ireland was not driven by financial considerations. Consequently, the next section will delve into literature specifically related to au pair migration that has more impactfully shaped this research.

Numerous studies have focused on the migration of au pairs from developing countries to industrialised countries (Dalgas 2015;2016; Parrenas 2014; Stenum 2011) or from less affluent post-socialist countries to more affluent European countries (Búriková 2014, 2016; Rohde Abuba 2016; and Tkach 2016). There has been a recent shift in literature focusing on au pairs migrating from industrialised countries to other industrialised countries (Cox and Busch 2016; 2015; Ballard, 2015; Geserick 2016). Geserick (2016) examines German and Austrian au pairs images of America before arriving, how these images changed over time, and what comparisons can be made. Geserick states that the present-day German-speaking au pairs mostly belong to such a group of 'traditional' au pairs, meaning well-educated young people from the global north, they set out to spend a limited time abroad, the so-called 'gap year'. Geserick defines a 'traditional au pair' as a girl from an affluent family in a German-speaking region of Switzerland who travelled to live with a French-speaking family in order to gain cultural skills and knowledge through a type of cultural exchange. Geserick's

(2016) participants do not fall into the category of 'new au pairs' from the global south, who want improved economic position, social advancement, and often long-term migratory aspirations (Dalgas 2016; Tkach 2014). Geserick, on the other hand, admits that both 'new' and 'traditional' au pairs are lured to the United States of America. According to Geserick, women who leave their families behind to care for someone else's children and send remittances back home (Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2003) are not classified as "new au pairs," whereas au pairs from the Global North are drawn to the au pair experience to improve their skills and sense of self, and they try to view their relocation as a rite of passage. (Búriková and Miller, 2010; Geserick 2012). However, Geserick (2016) states that participants in her study from wealthier backgrounds have different expectations for their time in their host countries than au pairs from post-socialist nations (Búriková 2016; Rohde Abuba 2016; and Tkach 2016).

According to Búriková (2016), au pairing as a form of cultural exchange and migrant domestic labour have become more difficult to distinguish on a macro level as a result of the European Union Enlargement[8], which lowered obstacles for Slovakian au pairs to enter the United Kingdom quickly and without visas. Because of this, au pairs didn't have to perfectly fit into the stereotype of being young, single, and choosing a cultural and linguistic exchange. This demonstrated flaws in formal definitions and their application, challenging the "basic" expectations with regard to au pairing. The regulations governing au pairing, by framing it as primarily a cultural exchange and positioning au pairs as young individuals akin to their hosts, have historically aimed

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[8] Following the accession of ten additional countries to the European Union (EU) on 1 May 2004, only Ireland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (post Brexit) offered people of the A10 nations (Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) instant unfettered access to the labour market. A10 nations were free to enter the country, remain, and work (Eur-Lex 2007; Burikova 2016).

to maintain the au pair arrangement distinct from traditional employment. Yet, the real-life complexities and various situations within the au pair sphere have frequently tested the limits of these guidelines and the key distinctions they try to maintain (Anderson 2009; 2014; Calleman 2010; Cox 2006; Cox 2007; Hess & Puckhaber 2004; Búriková 2015; Yodanis & Lauer 2005).

These real-life complexities are analysed by Oishi and Ono (2019) research on au pairing in Australia. They concentrated on the North-to-North migration of au pairs within industrialized countries. Australia, like Ireland, has scant studies on au pairing. They contended that au pairs in their study came to Australia for cultural reasons (mainly to learn English), rather than economic ones. They found that au pairs were rendered invisible and vulnerable by the informalities of the au pair agreement. Additionally, the idea of cultural exchange and being part of a family blurred aspects of 'paid domestic labour'. However, au pairs in this research had imagined cultural exchange and being part of family would improve their future career prospects, through actual experience au pairs learned that this could be a pitfall undermining their rights.[9]

Participants in this Research

This research includes interviews and ethnographic encounters with twenty-two au pairs, twenty-one host families (see table 2 & 3 below), three stay at home mothers, nine early childhood educators and owners, ten policy makers, and three au pair and nanny agency owners. That is a total of sixty-eight participants.

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[9] See Chapter Three for a detailed discussion on au pair's expectations.

Figure 2: Table-Au Pair Profiles

Name/age:	Nationality:	Education:
Amy [23]	France	Degree in English and Spanish
Ann [31]	Brazil	Degree
Ava [20]	France	Degree
Avril [30+]	France	Left college
Caroline [28]	Chile	Degree psychologist
Caroline [35]	Brazil	Degree works in oil company
Dion [20]	France	Started a college degree
Evie [28]	Spain	Degree
Jennifer [22]	Zimbabwe	Degree
Lily [20]	Germany	A-levels
Linda [21]	France	Degree
Lisa [19]	Germany	Secondary
Lola [28]	Spain	Degree
Mandina [29]	Italy	Degree in tourism
Mia [29]	Spain	Degree childcare
Michelle [20]	Mexico	Secondary school- starting degree
Mora [28]	Spain	2 degrees teaching and pedagogy
Nadine [28]	Germany	Degree
Patricia [26]	Canada	Psychology degree
Rosalee [27]	France	Degree
Tessa [25]	Spain	Degree teaching
Violet [21]	Germany	Secondary School- Starting a degree

This research highlights several noteworthy gender dynamics. With the exception of three men, all participants were female. Historically in Ireland, childcare has been positioned as a woman's responsibility (see Chapter Two). This was partly due to the Catholic Church's strong influence in promoting and supporting traditional roles for women and shaping attitudes toward heteronormative and patriarchal gender roles (Flanagan 1975; Robinson 1978; Inglis 1987; Ferriter 2009), as well as its impact on the country's social circumstances and legal system. While these ideals continue to be challenged, the everyday practices in Irish family homes often remain gendered as reflected by my research participants.

The majority of au pairs in this study were female and identified as women, aged between 19 and 35. Among the twenty-two participants, there was only one male au pair named Dion, a 20-year-old from France who identified as a man. Dion's host family specifically sought a male au pair to fulfil the role of a "big brother" for their 6-year-old son. Despite actively advertising on Facebook and creating a profile on AuPair World, Dion encountered difficulties in finding a host family in Ireland who preferred a male au pair. This highlights the prevailing gender imbalance in the childcare and domestic work sectors, where women predominate, as outlined in Chapter Two (CSO 2019). In this research, host mothers were more likely to choose women for the role of au pair. This reinforces gender norms in terms of childcare being most associated with the duties and responsibilities of women. As Savigny (2014: 803) states: "childcare is often positioned as a women's issue rather than a parental one. Structurally, societally this is embedded through existing legislation which disproportionately allocates paternity and maternity leave. Conflating childbearing with childcare produces the assumption that childcare is a woman's 'problem'." However, by choosing to have an au pair (regardless of the au pair's gender), host mothers could be seen as challenging historical gender expectations by outsourcing childcare roles that were traditionally associated with mothers. At the same time, as discussed in Chapter Four, host mothers might also reinforce these gender ideals by having a 'replacement mother' in their home. Therefore, the gender dynamics at play here are complex. What is more, host mothers in this study took on the responsibility of finding suitable childcare for their families, and once an au pair was selected, the primary relationship was between the host mother and the au pair, with host fathers largely invisible in this dynamic. Host fathers' absence in research participation and in actively managing childcare within the home again reinforces gender norms in

terms of parenthood, and more accurately, parenthood being positioned as primarily a woman's duty.

While acknowledging that multiple gender dynamics are at play in relationships involving host fathers and au pairs, fathers and mothers, parents and children, and au pairs and children, particularly regarding care work, this thesis primarily focuses on the dynamic between the host mother and the au pair. Other gendered interactions are outside the scope of this project.

It is worth noting that six of the au pairs were from non-EU countries, including Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Canada, and Zimbabwe. The remaining sixteen au pairs were from EU countries such as Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and Norway. All au pairs came from middle class backgrounds and had completed at least secondary level education. Some had also obtained third level degrees from universities, while others were pursuing third level education while working as au pairs in Ireland. One au pair possessed two university degrees. Additionally, it is noteworthy that all the au pairs' families in their home countries based on incomes, education, assets, and professions placed them in the middle-class strata in Ireland or higher.

It is important to highlight that unlike domestic work, none of the participants in the study sent remittances back home, had dependents in their home countries, or came to Ireland seeking a better standard of living. Instead, the au pair participants arrived in Ireland with diverse and arguably privileged motivations. Their motives included enhancing their career prospects in their home countries through English language proficiency, embarking on a cultural exchange, becoming a member of an Irish family, taking a break from their stressful careers, fulfilling college requirements, or going on a gap year. These are just a few examples of the many reasons why au pairs choose to

come to Ireland, and it is noteworthy that the reasons are not limited to the brief list above. However, it is worth mentioning that while some au pairs returned to their home countries or pursued their initial intentions, others chose to stay in Ireland or continue their studies there.

Figure 3: Table- Host Family Profiles

Name:	General Location in Ireland:	Occupation: General trade/sector	Interview with au pair/s in their household:
Aine	East-central (town)	Education	No
Aoife	Northeast (town)	Education	No
Bridget	East (town)	Education	**Yes**
Carla	Southeast (town)	Health	No
Chloe	South (urban)	Recruitment	No
Edna	East (urban)	Public sector	No
Kate & Evan	Northeast (town)	Public sector	No
Lacey	West (urban)	Health	No
Lydia	East (town)	Health	No
Macy	East (town)	Unknown	No
Mary	East (urban town)	telecommunications	No
Miranda	West (urban)	Education	No
Molly	East (urban)	Public sector	No
Niamh and Tom	Southeast (town)	Environmental & Farming	**Yes**
Nola	South (urban town)	Education	**Yes**
Sara	East-central (town)	Public sector	No
Sindy	East (urban)	Health	No
Sinead	East-central (town)	Beauty	No
Susan	East (urban)	Public sector	No

Twenty-one parents were interviewed during this research: nineteen mothers and two fathers (see table above). Eighteen were in heterosexual couple relationships and three were single mothers. Host families involved in this research were contacted through Facebook groups, recruited via snowballing methods, or responded to an online

advertisement. All participating host families currently have or previously had an au pair. In most cases, host fathers did not express a desire to be interviewed, and during participant observation, they were often absent from the household. Additionally, when my research moved online because of Covid-19, fathers did not want to be interviewed directly, but they did occasionally lurk in the background. In instances where they were present, their interactions with me were limited to small talk mostly about the weather. On one occasion I asked a host father a question about hosting an au pair and he responded with a smile "I will leave that one for the wife". The two host fathers that were actively involved in this research were also actively involved in the selecting and interview process of finding an au pair for their family.

All host mothers were working part-time or full time. All host fathers were in full time employment. All participants' incomes, education, professions and sometimes assets placed them in at least the middle-class strata in Ireland. Host families were from different counties around Ireland. The host families had children between the ages of six months and 12 years, and the number of children in each family varied between one and five. All host families that had children above the age of two years eight months enrolled them into preschool for three hours of free care under the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme (see Chapter Two) and children above the age of four years. In most cases children of five years or older were in primary school.

This research involved various other participants, including nine individuals who were early childhood educators and owners, three stay at home mothers, nine policy makers, and three owners of au pair and nanny agencies.

The stay-at-home mothers are located in the southeast, east (town), and east (urban) areas of Ireland. They are exclusively from heterosexual couples and belong to the middle-class strata, based on their pre-childbirth careers as well as their husbands' careers, education, and assets. Each of these mothers had received a third level education. Their choice to stay at home after having children was influenced by the high cost of childcare and the belief that it was the most suitable option for their families. The age range of their children was from six months to seven years, and family sizes varied from one to three children. All of the mothers participated in the ECCE scheme and enrolled their children in preschool once they reached two years and eight months of age.

The early childhood educators all identified as women and were based in different early childhood centres around Ireland, including Wicklow, Carlow, Dublin, Kildare, and Kilkenny. Among the policy makers that contributed to this research, there was one representative from The Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU), one from Big Start (members of SIPTU union), one senator from the Labour Party, one politician from Sinn Féin, one Carlow councillor for the independent party, one Sinn Féin Teachta Dála (TD) for Carlow and Kilkenny, one mayor of Carlow in 2020, one independent party councillor from Carlow, one former independent senator and one Fianna Fail TD for Carlow and Kilkenny.[10] The owners of the au pair and nanny agencies, all of whom identified as women, are based in Dublin, Carlow, and Laois.

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[10] To protect the privacy of the policymakers involved, I will make every effort to minimize the use of their names. However, it is important to acknowledge that due to the public nature of their positions, in certain situations, it may be necessary to mention specific names.

Methodology

Before embarking on ethnographic research, Tier 3 ethical approval was granted by the Maynooth University Social Science Ethics Committee (SRESC-2020-2376298). In accordance with the university requirements, participants were asked to sign a consent and information form prior to interviews and participant observations. In agreement with ethical guidelines, no participant under the age of 18 was included or interviewed in this research. While children were present at host families' homes and with the au pairs during the ethnographic research, they were never directly interviewed nor were they left under my supervision. All names have been anonymized using pseudonyms with the exception of the policy makers. Locations have also been anonymized; for instance, if a participant lives in a town outside Dublin, it will be referred to as a Dublin suburb or a general location such as the southeast of Ireland. Additionally, to further protect participants' anonymity, their occupations have been slightly altered to the general trade and/or sector that they work in.

My entrance point into the field was through Facebook au pair groups that were only open to members in Ireland. I was given permission to post advertisements on these groups and to send private messages to the members of these groups. I messaged host families and au pairs directly, informing them about my doctoral topic and asked them if they would be interested in talking to me about the experience of au pairing or hosting an au pair. The first person to respond was a host mother, who invited me to her home. From then on, several host families and au pairs contacted me, who in turn helped me connect with others who were interested in participating in the study. I included all participants who met the criteria mentioned above.

Facebook groups were an excellent platform for me to learn more about the situation for au pairs and host families in Ireland. Au pairs contacted each other in threads to schedule social gatherings, they discussed salary and conditions, sought guidance, and sometimes warned about unscrupulous employers. Au pairs also placed advertisements in search of a host family. In addition, host families advertised for an au pair to join their households. In other threads, host families discussed remuneration and asked for or provided advice to other hosts.

Finding participants for this research turned out to be relatively easy. Before the Covid-19 pandemic au pairs were more readily available to meet up with or without the children in their care. It was more difficult however to meet with parents due to their busy schedules. On some occasions when I went to their homes in the morning, they were too busy to talk to me whilst getting ready for work. When the Covid-19 lockdowns of 2020 and 2021 happened, and this research was forced to pivot from in-person to digital methods for a time, host mothers became more available due to ease of online communications.

Before Covid-19 I carried out ethnographic research with au pairs in parks, play groups, café, pubs and in their host family homes. I met them during their work and on their days off. I joined public debates, and a childcare protest in Dublin that involved over 30,000 people.[11] I went to host family's homes to observe and help with their daily routines. I interviewed politicians, au pair agencies workers, childcare providers, and workers. Additionally, I went to public debates in the Dail.

During Covid-19 everything moved online. I followed au pairs on Instagram and Facebook and joined numerous au pair groups and mom forums online. I continued to

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[11] See Chapter Two for ethnographic data from protests.

do interviews via skype, WhatsApp and Facebook messenger and re-engaged with key participants from earlier in the study to see how their circumstances had changed during Covid19. I followed government debates and analysed documents on government websites. I followed newspaper stories about childcare infrastructure and au pairing in Ireland.

I conducted immersive ethnography around Ireland by forging relationships with the various stakeholders (host families, au pairs, policy makers and early childhood providers and workers). I engaged in in-depth participant-observation and interviews. This project utilised multi-sited research to elicit a holistic understanding of my topic by following the people, things, metaphors, stories, biographies, and conflicts inherent therein. I treat ethnography as not simply a means of data collection but as a dynamic process of active engagement with participants. Fieldwork and participant observation is supplemented by secondary resources.

Ethnographic observations have been carried out in host family homes and with au pairs to understand their experiences in everyday life. Also, I have utilised quantitative research methods to analyse government documents and statistical data about childcare and au pairing in Ireland. I have also collected government statistics on childcare infrastructures, employment statistics, social policies and legislations from the Central Statistics Office and Government of Ireland (GOV.ie).

Covid-19 Methodology

When I began my fieldwork in January 2020, I was meeting au pairs in coffee shops and drinking copious amounts of coffee, with none of the anxieties that would come to be associated with physical proximity associated with Covid-19. I was going to parks and pubs, socialising with these women and their friends. I went into host

families' homes, touching their mugs, without using hand sanitiser. On the 11th of February 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) announced a name for the new coronavirus disease: COVID-19. One month later, the WHO declared the novel outbreak a global pandemic. I use March 2020 as a starting point in my analyses because in Ireland, schools, childcare services, universities, and other educational services closed for a two-week period. It was subsequently extended, incorporating both reopening and closures, lasting until April 2021.

In the space of weeks, customary direct contact became taboo, and 'traditional' in person ethnographic methods were dispensed with because of a national 'lockdown' throughout Ireland. Virtual ethnography methods and online interviews became the only research avenue available, as socialising outside of the household became distasteful, socially discrediting, and eventually illegal.[12] I had no other option but to 'do' ethnography online via Skype, WhatsApp, Facebook, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Instagram, Facebook messenger and au pair diaries. Interestingly, after lockdown measures were enacted, I had an influx of participants wishing to share their experiences with me online as they were confined to their homes and had more time to chat with me, and au pairs regularly contacted me as a friendly interlocutor. I was eager to listen to their complaints about lockdown and its effect on their Irish experience. This may have been because au pairs and host families needed a convenient distraction and, occasionally, a shoulder to cry on. However, it situates this research in a particular time and place and therefore reveals the unique pressures host families and au pairs were under.

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[12] In October 2020, the Cabinet Covid-19 sub-committee introduced fines for people who were not abiding by level 5 lockdown guidelines see Graduated fines on the way for breaking Covid rules (rte.ie) (Regan 2020).

Structure of Thesis

This thesis follows a chronological narrative, charting the trajectory of au pairs and host families from the pre-contact phase. This phase includes the period before the au pair leaves their home country for Ireland and before a host family selects an au pair to join their household. It extends to the establishment, maintenance, or potential breaking of boundaries, and explores whether a family is created or not. Each chapter marks a step forward in this collective narrative.

Chapter Two, examines informal and formal childcare in Ireland, providing an examination of the intricate components contributing to Ireland's childcare crisis and its reliance on au pairs. This chapter presents a detailed socio-historical and policy-based account of women's employment history in Ireland, along with the establishment of centre based childcare facilities. The discussion includes an analysis of cultural factors, such as gender ideologies emphasizing women's roles in households, and the prevailing notion that mothers bear primary responsibility for childcare choices. These gender norms are reinforced and shaped by social policies such as the National Childcare Scheme (NCS), the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE), and maternity leave, significantly influencing the employment landscape of au pairs in Ireland. To illustrate this complex interplay, the organizational framework of care loops (Isaksen and Näre 2019; Búriková 2019) is utilized.

Chapter Three explores au pair and host family expectations, examining how au pairs envision their role before experiencing it and analysing how host families anticipate an au pair fitting into their family and what they expect from an au pair. This chapter delves into influencing factors, such as au pair agencies and the media, drawing insights from anthropological literature on 'the imaginaries'.

Chapter Four investigates the micro-politics of employing au pairs. This chapter employs the concept of 'boundary work' and examines social and symbolic boundaries within the field of anthropology (Barth, 1969; Wallman, 1978). The term 'boundary work' is utilized as a theoretical framework to examine how host families and au pairs navigate social boundaries within the household, emphasizing the negotiation of these boundaries at the onset of their relationship. This chapter also adapts the concept of 'intensive mothering by proxy' coined by MacDonald (2010:91) to analyse controlling mechanisms applied by host mothers.

Chapter Five analyses how au pairs may tactfully negotiate and set boundaries in homes that do not belong to them, continuing to use the theoretical framework of 'boundary work'. However, Hochschild's theory of emotional labour is incorporated, resonating with experiences revealed by au pairs throughout the interview process and early stages of employment. The chapter highlights the essential timing of their efforts, emphasizing their enthusiasm to impress host families. It explores the compromises, extra effort, and emotional labour undertaken by au pairs, assuming reciprocal gestures from their hosts and how this may contradict au pairs effort to establish boundaries.

Chapter Six explores how the relationships between au pairs and host families develop over time, elucidating their experiences, rhythms, and routines inside host families' homes. It investigates how these elements contribute to the creation or non-creation of a 'family.'

Chapter Seven examines the maintenance and disruption of boundaries within the household from the perspective of au pairs and their host families. These boundaries encompass a wide range of sociocultural practices, with specific emphasis on the

placement of the au pair's allocated private space within the broader home. The objective is to underscore the importance of violated boundaries in identifying and comprehending the set boundaries. Despite attempts during the interview stage to create clear expectations, boundaries are challenging to determine until breached by au pairs and/or host families.

Chapter Two: Remunerated Childcare: From Cottage to Crèche and Back

> "It is [early childhood services that are] undervalued by everybody. If we are undervalued by the top, the people in government then society will follow and think of it as a less than profession."
>
> (Aideen pre-school owner, 2020)

On an overcast January morning in 2020, I joined a protest at a crèche/nursery in a housing estate in southeast rural Ireland. The protest was organized by the crèche owner after her insurance premiums more than tripled from 1000 to 3600 euros annually. The insurance premium caused a sense of uneasiness among crèche owners and staff throughout Ireland. I arrived at the crèche at 9 a.m. and saw no one, so I figured that I had the wrong date and hour. As I drew closer to the crèche, I noticed a large banner with the words 'SAVE CHILDCARE SERVICES,' along with smaller banners in the window (see figure 2).

Figure 4: A protest at a crèche in south-east rural Ireland.

I went to the crèche's back door and rang the doorbell. A woman who worked there answered the door and welcomed me in, adding, "thank you for coming and supporting us." I entered the main classroom, brightly decorated with posters of Disney characters and children's artwork, and sat in a tiny children's chair, surrounded by other women crouched uncomfortably on diminutive seats. They offered me tea or coffee and some pastries, and one woman inquired, "What crèche do you work in?" I explained that I was an anthropologist researching au pairs and childcare in Ireland and instantly one woman responded, "Oh really cool, it's a disgrace how this nation has gone, day-care, healthcare, everything is fucking horrible." There were no children present, and resentment and anger permeated the room. I agreed with her and continued to converse with the other ten women present.

Other volunteers were preparing banners for the demonstration outside the crèche. One female politician was there to support the cause and appeared upset about the industry,

but she insisted on being in every photograph whenever possible. Another woman complained about TUSLA (Child and Family Agency) inspections, saying that "it's merely a tick the box organization" and that "it's not about the children anymore, it's all about the paperwork" at the Montessori schools and crèches that they worked for.[13] We all left the crèche with signs and banners after enjoying coffee and cake. We simply stood there in the chilly weather while holding up the banners and signs as the owner pulled out some speakers and blasted some upbeat music. More people began to arrive, primarily mothers and two fathers who bring their children to the crèche. A newspaper journalist was present, snapping photographs and taking notes. There was no yelling or chanting; we just stood and talked, and the parents, and workers largely complained about the government, while the workers complained about their earnings, stating: "Irish people never make a fuss, we just whine and never do anything about it," one woman added, "but we are doing something today".

Introduction

I conducted my research during a time of political turmoil that impacted early childhood services in Ireland. The protest described here was modest in scale, but it represents similar small rallies outside childcare facilities organised by early childhood service providers around Ireland. These local protests were counterpointed by occasional large-scale protests, such as an event in Dublin on February 5th, 2020, with 30,000 people that I will discuss in this chapter. The vignette above provides a glimpse into the current landscape of early childhood services in Ireland. It highlights

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[13] TUSLA is a child and family agency in Ireland. The Child and Family Agency formed an independent entity in 2014, integrating several services for children and families. It is the State agency in charge of enhancing children and family's well-being. The Child and Family Agency Act 2013 marks a complete overhaul of child protection and support services in Ireland. TUSLA oversees inspecting registered pre-schools, play groups, day nurseries, crèches, day-care centers, and similar facilities for children aged 0 to 6 years (TUSLA n.d; Citizens Information 2023).

the various challenges faced by parents, educators, and policymakers in ensuring access to high-quality, affordable, and inclusive early childhood care and education. Many parents, particularly mothers, struggle to obtain appropriate and affordable early childhood care — a fact made even more prevalent and evident by the Covid-19 pandemic. Some mothers may not return to the labour force after having children. The Irish Times (newspaper) released statistics from the Network Ireland Survey, which found that "half of working mothers consider giving up work over childcare costs" (Holland 2020).[14] This survey comprised 500 women, and 49.3% considered quitting their jobs to become stay-at-home mothers due to the high expense of childcare (Holland 2020). According to Janta's (2014), research for The RAND Corporation, childcare expenses are a significant factor when deciding how to balance work and family responsibilities in Ireland, especially for low-income households.[15] This may leave women in a type of trap. It is possible that parents, especially women, would be better off remaining at home and taking care of their children themselves if childcare prices were too high or if crèche opening hours do not accommodate shift and/or flexible work. As a result, women's labour-force inactivity can harm their future career prospects (European Commission 2013), pension and access to PRSI benefits that they would be entitled to if in paid employment for example maternity and paternity benefits.

In this chapter I will examine the complex components contributing to Ireland's childcare crisis and reliance on au pairs. First, I will outline cultural factors such as

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[14] Network Ireland is a non-profit, volunteer group that promotes women's professional and personal growth. They provide a forum for women to network and exchange ideas; they encourage women to achieve their career objectives; and they help women who are starting businesses or returning to work in Ireland (Network Ireland, n.d.)

[15] The RAND Corporation is a research institution dedicated to creating resolutions for public policy dilemmas, aiming to enhance global communities' safety, security, health, and prosperity. See RAND at a Glance | RAND

gender ideologies that emphasize women's role within the household and the notion that mothers are primarily responsible for childcare choices. Next, these gender norms are reinforced and informed by social policies such as the National Childcare Scheme (NCS), the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE), maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, and parents leave, and wield significant influence over the employment landscape of au pairs in Ireland. Lastly, to illustrate this intricate interplay, I utilize the concept of care loops (Isaksen and Näre 2019; Búriková 2019), which serves as an organizational framework. This concept helps reveal how social policies and gender ideologies impact the employment of au pairs and how parents manage the daily 'patchwork' of childcare (Isaksen and Näre 2019).

Childcare Challenges: Historical and Current Realities

It is challenging for parents to find affordable, high-quality, and flexible childcare in Ireland due to the lack of family-friendly policies.[16] Prior to the lifting of the marriage bar in 1973 (see below), there had been minimal demand for childcare services, and it was largely the mother's obligation to outsource care, typically to family members, neighbours, or childminders in their locality. According to Hochschild (1989), during

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[16] Ireland has developed initiatives, including the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) and the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE) (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth 2019; 2022). It is important to note, other policies exist in Ireland, their significance to affordable childcare may be reduced. These policies include a 26-week maternity leave, unpaid parental leave for 26 weeks, a two-week paternity leave, and a 7- week parent's leave. Notably, a recent measure aimed at improving work-life balance has passed through all rounds of the Oireachtas. This measure includes provisions for two years of breastfeeding breaks, as well as the opportunity to seek remote employment and flexible arrangements for parents and carers. It should be mentioned that this measure was approved after fieldwork completion. (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth 2023). (Further details about social policies are provided below)

the height of the American women's movements in the 1970s, women in California began working outside the home. She contended that women were disproportionately assigned domestic chores at home, and that "even working mothers who did have maids couldn't imagine combining work and family in such a carefree way" (Hochschild, 1989: 1-2) See also (McGinnity et al, 2007; Fine-Davis, 2021).

Even if a mother employs a maid and works outside the home, a woman's commitment to domestic responsibilities and care persists when she returns home from work for "the second shift" (Hochschild 1989:4). My fieldwork data suggests a similar phenomenon five decades later in the Irish context. Host mothers were largely responsible for selecting and hiring au pairs, often advertising on Facebook groups or set up a profile on AuPair World to find a suitable au pair (see Chapter Three). In addition to interviewing, selecting, and paying the au pair, host mothers made contracts both written and/or verbalised, distributed work, and requested au pairs to shadow their routine with their children and how to do specified domestic duties (see Chapter Four). As indicated by the statistics below, certain professions in Ireland, like au pairing and early childhood teaching, exhibit distinct gendered discrepancies, underscoring the dominance of women in paid employment within care-related roles.

Social Policy

In Ireland the government introduced various schemes, the most recent being the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) which provides 'Universal Childcare' and 'Income Assessed Subsidies' to parents availing of formalised childcare since 2019 and in 2018 the state initiated the Early Childhood Care and Education scheme (ECCE) offering childcare assistance to parents (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth 2019; 2022). The universal childcare subsidy is available for all

children over the age of 6 months but under the age of 15 years. A deduction of 1.40 euro per hour up to a maximum of 45 hours per week and this is deducted from the overall bill from childcare providers. For example, if one child attends preschool for 20 hours a week in addition to ECCE, a subsidy of 28 euro per week is deducted from the cost. An income assessed subsidy is means tested and a household's reckonable income[17] must be less than €60,000 per year to qualify. If a family qualifies for an income assessed subsidy a maximum of 5.10 per hour is deducted for a child under the age of 12 months and a maximum of 3.75 euro for a child over 6 years old and less than 15 years old (NCS 2023).

ECCE provides parents with a limited provision of 3 hours of free early childhood services per day, to children only over the age of 2 years 8 months (Citizens Information 2022). The NCS and ECCE are only available for children in TUSLA-registered early childhood facilities. In Ireland, childcare infrastructures are primarily private institutions with soaring service costs, a low income for staff and limited spaces for children. The government's website suggests universal childcare, but for most families, three hours is insufficient. This may be insufficient for the flexible hours that retail employees are required to work, such as evenings and weekends, or for the early beginnings and late finishes of medical or shift workers. Because only some parents have the luxury of relying on 'volunteer caregivers' (mainly family members and friends), it is not a reliable strategy for meeting the needs of all parents. As a result, parents are compelled to choose the most financially feasible option, referred to by Cox (2011) as the marketized childcare economy.

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[17] Reckonable income is defined as net income minus any multiple-child discount. Families with two children under the age of 15 would see their income cut by €4,300. Families with three or more children under the age of 15 will have their income reduced by two times €4,300, for a total reduction of €8,600 (NCS 2023).

Local Care Loops

In a "Special Thematic Issue," Isaksen and Näre (2019: 596) introduced the concepts of 'local care loops' and 'care as patchwork' to examine the localized micro-mobility of day-to-day care practices, focusing on themes of gender egalitarianism, migration, care, and social policy matters. The articles in this issue highlight similarities and differences in processes linked to the commodification of childcare and the transformation of gender ideologies within post-socialist nations [Czech Republic (Souralová 2019), Slovenia (Hrzenjak 2019), and Slovakia (Burikova 2019)] and Nordic welfare countries [Norway (Isaksen and Bikova 2019), Sweden (Eldén and Anving 2019), and Finland (Näre and Wide 2019)].

They utilize the increasing demand for local paid domestic care among families with children as a framework to investigate how local norms and political processes influence changing care practices and gender dynamics. Isaksen and Näre (2019: 594) assert the concept of local care loops

> as a sensitizing concept that emphasizes the routine, daily practices, and micro-mobilities of care that create loops within and between the home, the workplace, the kindergarten and school, the sites where hobbies and sports take place, and the homes of grandparents and paid local care workers and so forth.

In order to comprehend care loops in Ireland, I will provide an overview of policy and legal transformations that have impacted the increased participation of women in the labour market.[18] This shift has led to a heightened demand for childcare services within the country, particularly during the 1990s. I will delve into existing literature that examines cultural factors and social policies contributing to the demand for au

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[18] See more on care loops below.

pairs. These studies explore how mothers may seek at-home care while relying on substitute caregivers, as outlined by Macdonald (2010) and Cox (2011).

In Ireland, there is a scarcity of literature on the impact of family friendly social policies (structural) and cultural factors (ideals of motherhood and childcare) on paid domestic labour in private homes. However, Smith (2015) claims that the demand for domestic workers in Ireland increased, particularly during the 2008 economic downturn and that due to Ireland's high childcare costs, parents turned to hiring domestic help, specifically au pairs from both European countries and non-European countries — particularly Brazil. According to Smith (2015), even while public investment on childcare has increased, childcare is still exceedingly costly, and with more women returning to work and forming dual income families, families are hiring au pairs. However, it is important to acknowledge that Smith's analysis does not fully account for the influence of cultural factors such as motherhood ideals in the decision-making process of hiring au pairs. This chapter aims to explore the interplay between social policies, cultural factors, and diverse variables influencing the hiring patterns of au pairs in Ireland.

However, a growing corpus of international scholarship highlights the importance of social policies and cultural factors in determining paid domestic worker employment (Anderson 2007; Cox 2006; Hobson et al. 2018; Williams 2012; Williams and Gavanas 2008; Búriková 2019; Isaksen and Näre 2019; 2022). For example, Williams and Gavanas (2008) examine how changes in social policy impact migrant women's labour in home-based childcare in Western Europe, particularly in London, Stockholm, and Madrid. They suggest that unlike the United States, the types of accessible state support, rather than a lack of public provisions, drive demand for paid care in Western Europe. They assert that an increase in the use of paid care in Western

European countries was caused by a shift away from the "male breadwinner" model of welfare provision toward the dual earners model, which promotes dual participation in the labour market. They also claim that there were not enough facilities to care for children of working mothers (Williams and Gavanas 2008: 13). This viewpoint contends that using a childcare provider is a solution to the inadequacies of national family policies since parents are forced to rely on the market because the welfare system does not provide sufficient childcare facilities. Similarly, Anderson (2007) attributes the rise of the paid domestic sector in the United Kingdom (UK) to a combination of factors, including an older population and an increase in women entering the paid labour market. As a result of these factors, there is a reproductive labour gap, changes in family formation, and a decrease in social services.

Likewise, Cox (2006) observes that in the UK, supply and demand for domestic work are sustained on the one hand by increased working hours and the high cost of State-provided childcare, and on the other hand by existing global inequalities in which low wage labour is transferred from poorer to wealthier countries. According to Williams and Gavanas (2008), while the state offers some childcare, the cost of state-provided nurseries is substantial and does not always provide the hours necessary for working parents.

As a result, the demand for care in private homes is not just driven by a small set of individual householders' desires. The state does have a role in developing markets for care inside private families, even if the family is seen as a 'natural' structure that should be protected from governmental interference into private life is fraught with controversy (Williams 2003). Though more family-friendly policies like lengthier maternity leaves and flexible schedules such as part-time employment and flexible working hours have helped increase female employment in the UK (Walling 2005;

Penn 2007), the availability of state-funded childcare for preschool aged children is still limited (Cox 2006). Similarly, in Ireland family-friendly social policies have increased female participation in the labour force, but the availability of TUSLA-registered preschools is limited and despite the fact of state- initiates like NSC and ECCE, preschools are extremely costly for parents (Fine-Davis, 2021). In addition to the cost and availability in preschools, it also seems that many parents place greater trust in informal than formal childcare arrangements in Britian (Gregson and Lowe, 1994). This trust is reflected over two decades later in Ireland by one of my participants who uses a childminder instead of TUSLA-registered centre-based childcare:

> I absolutely did not want to put my child into a crèche. I can't believe there is an 18 month wait list for some crèches and I couldn't do that when I was 3 months pregnant, I couldn't think of anything worse. I wasn't putting my unborn child on a list, and I didn't even know their gender and you shouldn't count your chickens before they hatch. So, a crèche wasn't even on my mind and when it comes to childminders it's hard to get your hands on somebody that you trust. We couldn't get an au pair because our house is quite small, and I didn't want a stranger living in our house, and I didn't want a childminder coming to my house because I didn't want that responsibility. I went to play groups with my son, and this is where I found a childminder that operates from her home. It was very difficult and very stressful to find care. It took four months, and I took a 2-year career break (Roisin Mother March 2020).

Cultural factors such as ideals of motherhood and childcare have played an essential role in the increase of au pair employment, in addition to social policy changes. Academic research has stressed the significance of cultural perspectives in this situation. In particular, Cox (2011), Macdonald (2010), and Gregson and Lowe (1994) acknowledge that the idea of intensive mothering has a key role in influencing parents' decisions regarding hiring a nanny or an au pair. Intensive mothering is a situation in which host families use strategic tactics to carefully supervise and micromanage the caregiving obligations of their au pairs as if the au pairs were extensions of the mothers

themselves.[19]   Parents that subscribe to this concept favour care that is similar to maternal care, such as mother-substitute care (Cox 2011). Because they provide individualized care at home and the child does not have to share the caregiver with other children, nannies and au pairs are frequently employed. However, in Ireland it is common to use an orchestrated assortment of childcare providers such as having an au pair take the children to preschool for three hours a day or have a grandparent collect their children from school if the parents are dual workers. This meticulous assortment of care creates loops between varies locations and can involve varies people.

Gender Roles – State, Church and Family

The ideology that mother-like care is vital to one's idea of home holds a strong place in Irish history (Kennedy 2001; Inglis 1998). Ireland is distinctive among industrialized Western nations in terms of gender role limitations that persisted well into the 1970s and 1980s (Commission on the Status of Women 1972; Beale 1986; Galligan 1998; O'Connor 1998; Kennedy 2001). This was partly the result of the Catholic Church's strong influence on promoting and supporting a traditional role for women and on influencing attitudes toward traditional heteronormative and patriarchal gender roles (Flanagan 1975; Robinson 1978; Inglis 1987; Ferriter 2009), as well as its contribution to the country's social circumstances and legal system. According to Kennedy (2001), the family was commonly perceived in Ireland in the past and into the twenty-first century as a collection of individuals: wife, children, relatives, servants, all belonging to the male head — husband/father/master. The Roman Catholic Church has had a major impact on this collection of individuals within

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[19] See Chapter Four for more detail on intensive mothering.

the family unit as well as family behaviour patterns in contemporary Ireland through its social and moral teaching. According to Kennedy (2001), while Church thinking and teaching has been significant, state influences have tended to prevail. Although the impact of religion on the reinforcement of 'traditional' gender roles in attitudes and behaviour has been well documented (e.g. Reuther 1974; Daly 1975; Farley 1976; Fine-Davis 2016). The Catholic Church's influence in Ireland was particularly strong (Garvin 2004), outpacing that in other Catholic countries (Chubb 1971), particularly in regards to women's roles (Flanagan 1975; Robinson 1978) and issues related to sexuality and relationships, such as contraception, divorce, and abortion.

A number of legislative initiatives used in the early 1900s further restricted female participation in the labour market, including: (1) the 1925 Civil Service Act, (2) a marriage bar implemented in the civil service in 1932, and (3) a restriction on working-class women's access to the labour market in 1935 following the introduction of the Conditions of Employment Act (O'Dowd 1987). Due to these labour force limitations, women had relatively little spare money, which gave males the advantage in the household and in making important purchase decisions. In addition, women's place in Irish society as homemakers was still firmly established (Sheehan et al 2017). Laws of the State and provisions in the Irish Constitution pertaining to the status of women support the effect of Church teachings on societal norms and values (Constitution of Ireland 1937, Article 41.2). For example, Article 41.2 of the Irish Constitution of Ireland still reads today; "In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the state a support without the common good cannot be achieved." And "The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not

be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home." (Article 41.2, Constitution of Ireland, 1937).[20]

Financial Legislation

Although Ireland had a more 'traditional'[21] society than many other Western countries in terms of gender roles, change happened very swiftly in the middle of the 1970s (Fine-Davis 2021). Gender role attitudes were impacted by a number of variables, including that of Ireland's economic development, the international and internal women's movement, and the impact of Ireland's participation in the European Community beginning in 1973. These were strengthened by a number of administrative and legislative developments that affected the position and status of women. These included the repeal of the marriage bar in 1973. The 'marriage bar' required women in the public sector to leave their occupations as soon as they married to become stay-at-home mothers and wives. This prohibition was repealed for teachers in primary schools in 1957, but not for other women in the public sector until 1973. It required married women in a number of occupations, such as the civil service, second level teaching, banking, and so on, to resign upon marriage; whereas in other areas, such resigning was actively encouraged by tradition: see (O'Connor and Shortall 1999). As a result, married women were discouraged from working in the private sector.

In 1972, Ireland signed the Treaty of Accession to become a member of the European Economic Community (EEC), which is now known as the European Union (EU). The

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[20] A referendum will take place on the 8th of March 2024 to change or not change the wording of Article 41.2, Constitution of Ireland. See Equality Referendum: #VoteYesYes » The National Women's Council of Ireland (nwci.ie) (NWCI 2024).

[21] According to Gray et al. (2016), the word "traditional" is frequently used in relation to the decline of the "traditional family" and is based on incorrect and sentimental memories of family life in the past as well as quick snapshots that cast an unwarranted negative light on families today.

Treaty came into effect on January 1, 1973, along with Denmark and the United Kingdom. Ireland has remained a member of the EU ever since. As they followed EU regulations, laws pertaining to equal pay and employment were a direct effect of EU membership. From the 1970s onward, more married women joined the labour force, and this tendency has persisted to the present day (Callan and Farrell 1991). In 1975, equal pay law was passed, ending the practice of paying women less for work that was performed by their male co-workers. The Maternity Protection of Employees Act was passed in 1981, giving pregnant employees' rights. Following two national referenda in 1986 and 1995, with the latter passing by a very slim majority, more substantial reforms were made, including the legalization of divorce in 1995 (O'Connor 1998). These changes had a significant impact on how women were viewed in Ireland and frequently eliminated barriers to their independence and employment. The Employment Equality Act (1998) and Equal Status Act (2000) gave further employment rights to women in the workplace. Women's roles in Irish society began to shift as well, with a dual role forming for women as caregivers and workers. But despite these impending societal changes, the perception of the nuclear family structure remained unchanged (O'Connor 1998).

Employment Leave For Parents.

In Ireland, the governmental perspective on the interplay between family and work attempts to empower parents to make well-informed decisions regarding their employment and childcare choices. Additionally, the Irish government has taken proactive measures to institute family-friendly policies, potentially aiding the integration and sustained engagement of women within the labour sector (Hodgins et al, 2007). If a person becomes pregnant while employed or self-employed, they have

the entitlement to maternity leave lasting 26 weeks. Employers are not mandated to provide compensation during this period unless stipulated in their employment contract. Those who meet the prerequisites for PRSI (social insurance) contributions, including at least 39 weeks of PRSI payments within the year preceding the commencement of maternity leave, may qualify for Maternity Benefit, amounting to 262 euros per week. Some employers, for example the civil service, will continue paying the employees regular salary by 'topping up' 262 euro. Individuals have the option to avail of an additional 16 weeks of unpaid maternity leave, falling outside the scope of Maternity Benefit (Citizens Information 2023).

Paternity Leave spans two weeks and can be taken only after the birth of the child. In Ireland, the father of the child or partner (spouse, civil partner, or cohabitant) of the child's mother predominantly avail of this leave. Similar to maternity leave, employers are not obligated to provide payment for paternity leave. However, those meeting the necessary PRSI contribution criteria can access paternity benefit, amounting to 262 euros per week. In addition to maternity and paternity leave, parents are entitled to 7 additional weeks of parents leave that must be taking before the child turns two. Similar to maternity leave and paternity leave, employers are not obligated to provide compensation for parents leave. However, those meeting the necessary PRSI contribution criteria can access parent's benefit, amounting to 262 euros per week. After both maternity, paternity and parents leave, employers are mandated to reinstate returning parents in the same positions they held prior to their leave (Citizens Information 2023).

Subsequent to maternity, paternity leave and parents leave, parents are entitled to 26 weeks of unpaid parental leave. This leave must be taken before the child reaches 12

years of age, or 16 years of age if the child has a disability. Generally, a minimum of 12 months of employment with the employer is required to be eligible for parental leave. It's important to note that there is no social welfare payment available for parental leave. Additionally, both parents have equal and distinct entitlements to parental leave, affording each of them 26 weeks of leave (Citizens Information 2023). It should be noted that no participants in this research availed of their unpaid parental leave. And some mothers did not take the full 26 weeks of maternity leave because financially they needed to go back to work. 262 euro a week was not sufficient for their families.

In April 2023, the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provision Act 2023 successfully progressed through all stages in the Oireachtas and was subsequently enacted into law. This legislation grants every employee the lawful entitlement to request for remote work, provided they have completed 6 months of service at their current workplace and give 8 weeks' notice prior to the intended commencement of remote work. Employers are obligated to respond within 4 weeks and are required to offer reasons if the request for remote work is declined. Additionally, this legislation encompasses provisions allowing for the request of two years' worth of breastfeeding breaks (Citizens Information 2023; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth 2023).

Women Entering the Labour Force

The Irish economy saw extraordinary expansion throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. Ireland was dubbed the "poorest of the rich" by The Economist in 1988 before being dubbed "Europe's shining light" less than ten years later (Sheehan et al 2017: 163). In the 40-year span from 1966 to 2006, female employment nearly quadrupled

(from 289,144 to 822,808). For the majority of women, these shifts have resulted in a switch from the role of unpaid caregivers to dual roles as caregivers and workers in the house. In Ireland, like in the rest of the EU, females have dominated employment growth during the previous three decades (Fine-Davis 2007). The country's developing democratic structure has resulted in an increasing labour force, which has permitted higher labour-force involvement of women in general, and married women and mothers in particular. In 1971, married women made up 7.5% of the labour force, which was essentially inconsequential. By 1977, this number had doubled, and over the 20 years of economic expansion from 1989 to 2009, it went from 23.7% to 54%, with married women of reproductive age having a far higher employment rate at 72.6% (CSO, 2009). With the rising involvement of women in the reproductive age group in the work force, it was expected in 1998 that the demand for childcare would rise by 25% to 50% between 1998 and 2011 (Goodbody Economic Consultants 1998).

Female employment rates in Ireland peaked in 2007, when they were at 60.7% compared to 77.6% for males. By 2008, Ireland had entered a deep recession that contributed to an adjustment in the labour market. Between 2008 and 2012, the employment rate in Ireland declined substantially, from 69.1% to 59.1%, before marginally recovering in 2013 and 2014. During this time, male employment declined drastically from 76% in 2008 to 62.4% in 2012 before rising slightly to 64.6% in 2013. During this time, female employment fell from 60.6% in 2008 to 55.2% in 2012, with a minor uptick to 55.9% in 2013 but rebounded to 63.7% by 2019. In 2012, Ireland held the fifth-highest unemployment rate and the fifth-lowest employment rate in the EU. However, in contrast to men, women did not experience as significant a setback during the economic downturn (CSO 2011; O'Brien 2012; Sheehan et al 2017).

The 35-44 age group had the greatest participation rate for men, at 91.4 %. The greatest percentage for women was in the 25-34 age range, with 78.4 % of women in this age bracket working. In 2019, women made up 46 percent of the workforce. Females made up just under half of the labour force aged 15-19, the largest share of any age group (CSO 2019). According to the CSO's Labour Force Survey Q3 (2021), among women aged 25-54 in Ireland who are employed, the percentage who work part-time is higher for those with children (45.1%) than those without children (24.2%). The percentage of women who work full-time is higher for those without children (61.8%) than those with children (47.1%). It's important to note that the percentage of women with children who work part-time may be influenced by factors such as childcare responsibilities and the availability of flexible work arrangements. According to the Central Statistics Office, in (2019), the participation rate in the labour force for men in Ireland was 77.7%, with 70.1% working full-time and 7.6% working part-time. In contrast, the participation rate in the labour force for women was 63.7%, with 30.9% working full-time and 32.8% working part-time. When comparing the percentage of men and women with children who work full-time and part-time, it's important to note that women in Ireland are still more likely to take on a greater share of childcare responsibilities, which may impact their ability to work full-time.

In 2019, there were 1,058,100 women and 1,242,000 men working in Ireland. A quarter (24.3%) of working women were in professional jobs, while 16.9% were in administrative and secretarial occupations. A little more than a quarter (23.2%) of males worked in Skilled crafts, while 18.1% worked in Professional occupations. In 2019, women made up just less than half of the workforce (46%). The great majority (90.9%) of employees in skilled trades were men, whereas the majority (79.3%) of workers in caring, leisure, and other services were women (CSO 2019). In 2022, the

number of males in the labour force climbed by 8.2% (+105,700) to 1,399,800, while the number of females in the labour force increased by 11.4% (+125,700) to 1,232,700 (CSO 2022).

These figures are significant because they show the rising trend in women's labour market involvement, even if it continues to be lower than men. Additionally, the data show considerable disparities between sexes in the distribution of occupations, with specific industries dominated by males. The increase in households with two earners brings to light the rising need for early childhood services. The demand for au pairs may be influenced by the rising participation of women in the workforce and the shift away from the old "male breadwinner" welfare model toward the dual earners model.

Demand for Childcare Service- Discussion

According to Kennedy (2001) and Gray (2016), Ireland has transitioned from mothers providing at-home childcare to the growth of a centre-based care industry. Formal early childhood services were scarce or not available in many parts of Ireland until the 1980s and 1990s. As noted, this was owing, in part, to the fact that, until recently, the vast majority of Irish women did not work outside their homes. For those that did, childcare was often provided by family members, well-known neighbourhood childminders, or domestic help (Hayes and Bradley 2006; Murphy-Lawless 2000; Kennedy 2001). As demonstrated above, legislation and government policy prohibited women who worked in the civil service in Ireland from working outside the household. The aforementioned statistics show that women tend to work fewer hours after having children, and a greater percentage of women are employed in the majority of care-related occupations in Ireland.

According to an examination of the National Childcare Strategy (Office of the Minister for Children 2000), there were concerns with how childcare services were regulated and limited childcare supply in Ireland beginning in the late 1990s. The number of child abuse complaints had substantially increased from 49 in 1984 to 1609 in 1994 (Kennedy 2001). These accusations highlighted how little was known, and had previously been tracked, about how children were being cared for in Irish society and came from both the family context and institutional care services offered by the religious and volunteer sectors. Public activist Christine Buckley, for example, was a survivor of child abuse at an Irish orphanage called "Goldenbridge", which was administered by the Sisters of Mercy. Christine reached out to her father in Nigeria at the age of 37 and told him her experience; he contacted a prior university acquaintance, Al Byrne, who was the brother of broadcaster Gay Byrne, who became interested in Christine's situation. After Christine was invited to share her experience on RTÉ[22] Radio's 'The Gay Byrne Show' and 'The Late Late Show' hosted by Gay Byrne in 1992, thousands of listeners got in touch with her to share similar accounts of serious abuse allegations in Catholic institutions. For RTÉ, Christine relived her experiences in a documentary that was aired in 1996. The first televised exposé of child abuse in Ireland's industrial schools was titled 'Dear Daughter'. The documentary director afterwards turned the show into a series to share the experiences of additional survivors. (Child Rights International Network 2020). The truth was pushed into the front pages of the newspapers and garnered national exposure owing to that series and several more documentary programs and movies in the years that followed such as 'States of Fear' (1999), 'Song for a Raggy Boy' (2003) and 'The Magdalene Sisters'

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[22] Ireland's national television and radio broadcaster

(2002). An official state apology was issued to all victims in 1999 and in 2009 (McGarry 2019).

While women worked away from home after the removal of the marriage bar, childcare was unregulated, and abuse occurred due to a lack of controls. This helped to pave the way for the creation of official care. The National Childcare Act in 1991 (Department of Health and Children, 1991) and the ensuing Pre-School Regulations in 1997, which were consolidated as a result of the public outcry that followed the allegations of abuse, gave the state the opportunity to assume a new regulatory role for childcare services (Department of Health 1997). According to Valverde (2008), liberal democratic regimes, such as Ireland, "have a structural commitment to non-interference in private beliefs and activities of a moral and/or cultural nature. It is far easier for the state to respond to popular outcries than it is to orchestrate such a campaign on its own." (Valverde 2008: 25). Rather than solving or identifying issues on its own, the government may respond to public pleas. This, in turn, fuels public outcry as I witnessed in the Dublin protest described towards the close of this chapter.

In order to encourage more female labour participation, there was projected demand for care spaces. The "Celtic Tiger," or tigress was based on a huge increase in female labour (McGinnity et al., 2008), and by the late 1990s, the availability of childcare became a hot topic in politics and the media. Additionally, worries regarding the workers in the childcare industry and the capacity of the current informal infrastructure to adapt to increasing levels of demand were expressed in light of the anticipated surge in demand for childcare services (see Goodbody Economic Consultants 1998). According to an analysis of the National Childcare Strategy (NCS), many in government and main childcare advocacy groups predicted that increased demand

would lead to an expansion of care in the informal economy. (Gallagher 2012; 2014). Because formal early childhood facilities cannot meet the high demand, the informal sector, such as au pairs and childminders, has grown.

According to a number of comparison studies, childcare expenditures in Ireland are among the highest among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries (OECD 2015; OECD 2007; OECD 2020; OECD 2021). In 2019, Ireland's average monthly out-of-pocket full-time childcare expenses for children under the age of three were predicted to be €771, making it one of the costliest in the European Union (Motiejunaite-Schulmeister, Balcon, and de Coster 2019). The limited scope of these comparative analyses of full-time formal childcare costs only provides a partial understanding. This is demonstrated by Doorley et al. (2021), who revealed that parents in Ireland, on average, make use of formal childcare for less than full-time hours. Instead, they complement their childcare needs with informal and unpaid caregiving arrangements. Seas Suas (2017) the representative body for independent providers in the early education and childcare sector, undertook a survey of childcare providers. Their survey revealed that the number of places for babies and toddlers (under 2s) in childcare and crèche facilities is decreasing, regardless of increasing demand. If there is a decreasing availability for crèches and private childcare, the main alternatives left for parents include nannies, childminders, grandparents, family members, and au pairs.

Au pairing can be a far more affordable and flexible solution for Irish families. This is in part because no participants in this study received near minimum wage for au pairing, despite the Workplace Relations Commission (2019) suggesting that au pairs be paid a minimum wage. On average, they earned 100 to 200 euro per week for 30 to

50 hours of work, irrespective of the number of children they were caring for and one participant (Ann from Brazil 31 years old) received no 'pocket money' in exchange for room and board. The national minimum wage during the time of my fieldwork in Ireland was raised on February 1, 2020. A person aged 20 and over should earn a minimum of 10.10 euros per hour, a person aged 19 should earn 9.09 euros per hour, a person aged 18 should earn 8.08 euros per hour, and a person under 18 years of age should earn 7.07 euros per hour. For 'employees' living in their 'employers' homes, earnings for board and lodgings can be reduced, with a decrease of 90 cents per hour worked for board and a reduction of 23.86 euro per week or 3.42 per day for lodging (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment 2020). For example, if an au pair aged 19 worked 40 hours per week, she or he should be paid 363.6 euro per week or 303.74 euro after deductions for board and lodging. If a 20-year-old au pair worked 30 hours per week, he or she should be paid 303 euros per week, or 252.14 euros after board and lodging deductions. Because the children were not in school or early childhood facilities during some Covid-19 lockdowns, many au pair participants in this study worked over 40 hours per week and received on average 100 to 120 euro per week. It should be noted that the minimum wage in Ireland had increased slightly each year since the commencement of fieldwork. In 2021 A person aged 20 and over should earn a minimum of 10.20 euros per hour and a deduction of 91 cent per hour worked for board and 24.10 euro per week for lodgings. This increased to 10.50 per euro in 2022, with a decrease of 94 cents per hour worked for board and a reduction of 24.81 euro per week for lodging. A further increase to 11.30 euro per hour in 2023 with a reduction of 1.01 per hour worked for board and 26.70 for accommodation (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment 2020; 2021). However, amongst my participants the au pair 'wage' of 100 or 120 euro per week remained unchanged.

Throughout my research, I have maintained ongoing communication with most of the host families and inquired about any alterations to their au pair's 'pocket money'. Although, host families have not increased their au pair wages, some host families did offer additional payment for babysitting hours, usually amounting to no more than 50 euros per week.

The Quarterly National Household Survey by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in (2016) revealed that 70% of children in Ireland aged 0 to 12 in childcare are cared for by their parents or partners. However, it also shows that it is primarily preschool-aged children (62%) that are looked after by their parents when full-time childcare includes paying for the full school day. Non-parental childcare services such as crèches, Montessori schools, playgroups, or after-school facilities are the most common form of care for preschool-aged children, with 19% utilizing them, and the highest rate of utilization, 25%, observed in Dublin. For children aged 0 to 12, childminders, au pairs, and nannies are the second most popular non-parental care providers, utilized by 10% of children (CSO 2016).[23] It is important to note that while these statistics indicate the percentage of children utilizing different types of care, they do not reflect the percentage of parents, early childhood professionals, childminders, au pairs, and nannies caring for children.

According to an analysis of the Growing Up in Ireland (2015) study's childcare data, the majority of parents still use a network of informal childcare arrangements in the years before their child is eligible for the ECCE system (Byrne & O'Toole 2015). This may include care provided by childminders and grandparents. In the Growing Up in Ireland survey, 12.4% of new-borns were cared for by grandparents and 15.7% by

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[23] 2016 is the most recent data published by CSO.

other home-based caregivers, compared to 10.5% in centre-based care (Share, McNally & Murray 2014). The ECCE scheme is not intended to satisfy the childcare demands of working parents, and even once their children begin primary school, parents must make other arrangements for after-school and holiday care. Some early years providers also provide after-school care, but in general, parents must rely on a dizzying, and often shifting, mixture of care arrangements to satisfy their childcare needs (Murphy 2015; Búriková 2019). The increase in au pairing may have been influenced by this. According to one AuPair World.com correspondent, the popularity of au pairing has increased from 20,000 in 2020 to 38,000 in 2021 (AuPair World 2022). This is especially clear given how the Covid-19 Pandemic has affected the workplace flexibility needs of working parents.

Care Loops

The notion of care loops holds significance in Ireland due to the introduction of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme, which initially provided just three hours of free care per day for children aged 2 years and 8 months and older. This highlights a gap in Ireland's social policies, as they do not adequately support parents for this duration of the child's life. Moreover, the allocated three-hour period falls short for parents engaged in full-time or part-time employment, as it poses challenges in arranging drop-offs and pickups for their children and organizing care after their work hours. Nonetheless, the implementation of the National Childcare Scheme only partially alleviates the substantial expenses associated with childcare. Participants in this research stated it was not enough and childcare cost were still too expensive especially if more than one child needs care. This situation persists despite the fact

that some parents employing au pairs may require more flexible care options, with au pairs often willing to assist with drop-offs and pick-ups at these center-based services.

Care loops represent a "spatial concept and a visual metaphor," offering a depiction of the intricate dynamics of family life and the small-scale movements fundamental to care in particular childcare (Isaksen and Näre 2019: 594). These loops are far from disorganized; rather, they are meticulously orchestrated and structured by the interplay of social policies, welfare services, and gender ideologies. Encompassing daily caregiving tasks like feeding, dressing, bathing, and coordinating preschool and extracurricular activity logistics, care loops also extend to include individuals beyond the children's parents, such as au pairs and grandparents.

Understanding how families navigate childcare responsibilities necessitates an analysis of the structural (social policies) and cultural (gender ideologies) components that potentially shape care practices and the intricate care loops, which encompass the everyday micro movements inherent in childcare. The concept of 'care as a patchwork' (Isaksen and Näre 2019) entails routine activities that may fluctuate day by day based on the family's resources, constraints, and the presence of an au pair within the care loops.

Likewise, Búriková (2019) employs the concept of local care loops in Slovakia to examine the decision-making process of mothers who choose local childcare workers over migrant workers, relying on social networks and trust. Búriková examines family-oriented social policies in Slovakia and cultural notions of motherhood that shape these care loops, thereby revealing the mosaic-like nature of care that families establish. Búriková (2019: 654) states that daily care is fluid and unfixed and may be

positioned between "households, workplaces, nurseries, kindergartens, playgrounds, schools, and places where children have extracurricular activities".

According to Bach (2017), affluent women in Denmark strive to carefully balance their children's time spent at home and at institutions. In order to create the correct 'dose' of 'mummy' means picking up their child early from pre-school to "have a nice afternoon together". In Ireland social policies such as the ECCE scheme of 3 hours is undoubtedly insufficient for parents working full-time. Stay at home mothers like Claire (see below) have decided to put their careers on hold to mind their children and host mothers who employ au pairs and continue to work arrange for their au pair to do drop off and collection at preschools. According to Bach affluent mothers prefer to spend the afternoon with their children and their careers are put on the back burner. This is not a comparison between Demark and Ireland's structural policies but instead I want to highlight gender ideologies and mothers in this research reflect these gendered ideals that "a child needs their mother". Motherhood becomes an identity, and it might alter "women's view of the world of work" (Bach 2017:200). In my ethnographic research in Ireland, stay-at-home mothers sent their children to pre-school and saw institutional life as consistent with a "good childhood." Pre-school, according to one mother, "is fantastic for developing social skills and making friends, and it give me a few hours in the morning to get some housework done" (Claire, stay-at-home mother Ireland). Yet, it should be noted that the majority of stay-at-home mothers who participated in my research were working middle-class women who put their careers on hold because full-time formal early childhood institutions were too expensive.[24] But they also wanted to take advantage of the ECCE scheme and enrol

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[24] See Chapter One for more information on participants in this research.

their child in a centre-based institution. Claire, referred to previously, mentioned that she didn't have to return to work full-time, which put her in a fortunate situation that many Irish parents cannot afford. Nonetheless, she added that if she had to return to work, an au pair would have been the most cost-effective alternative:

> If I had to go back to work full time, it would have definitely been the cheapest option because it's cheaper than a childminder or full time crèche, but I don't think I'd be comfortable with a stranger living in my home. I am a very private person, and I just wouldn't like it. It might have been the only option because it's not worthwhile sending my child to a crèche all day and not having much at the end of the week to show for it. I'd rather his grandmother look after him but that's not fair either because she works part time, so this is the best option for us and the only reason I'm sending him to preschool is for him to mix with other children because it's good for a child's mind and social skills (Claire 2020).

Claire expresses her reservations and concerns about having an au pair live in her house as a substitute for other childcare choices. Although she agrees that hiring an au pair would be less expensive than hiring a childminder or enrolling her child in a full-time early childhood facility, she prefers privacy, and she doesn't want a stranger living in her home. The fact that Claire's mother works part-time prevents her from having her child cared for by his grandmother, which is something Claire would have preferred. Claire mentioned that her mother expressed a desire to take care of her grandchild and even considered early retirement, but this option was not feasible at the time. As a result, Claire views enrolling her child in preschool as a compromise because it enables him to socialize with other children while enhancing his cognitive and social abilities. Thus, in order to understand the fluidity of childcare needs in Ireland, we must examine the social and cultural contexts such as gender roles and ideologies, financial legislation, and educational structures which have informed them over time.

Protests and Providers

As outlined in the introductory vignette to this chapter, parents are not the only ones struggling to find flexible and cheap childcare in Ireland. The owner of a small early year centre wanted to hold a protest not only because parents were paying high childcare costs or staff members were receiving inadequate pay, but also because the cost of insurance for early childhood education providers had increased, making it difficult for the centre to remain open. This nursery/crèche cares for children full-time and part-time all year round. They were founded in 1997 under the slogan "home away from home." In quotes from insurance brokers such as Arachas and Allianz, several formal childcare facilities are being charged more than twice or triple their present insurance coverage. Ironshore, a market leader in early care insurance, has announced its withdrawal from the business. With a limited number of insurance providers in Ireland that cover childcare services, some fees have jumped by 300%. This type of small business owner cannot continue to provide services without raising day-care costs or reducing employee remuneration. The government promised to help childcare providers with the increased price, but the owner of this crèche only received a 175-euro cheque, which was insufficient to cover the costs of running her crèche. "We are currently facing a day-care crisis," she stated.

Figure 5:Photos from fieldwork at a protest in Dublin

Soon after the protest in the crèche, only a month before the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions took effect and just a few days before the general election, another protest took place in Dublin which contrasted sharply to the local one I had attended in January. On February 5th, 2020, over 30,000 individuals, largely women working in the early childhood sector and parents, yelled phrases such as "WHAT DO WE WANT, MORE PAY, WHEN DO WE WANT IT, NOW!" "NOT ON! NOT FAIR! WE SAY NO MORE!" on the streets of Dublin. Central Dublin swarmed with people wearing red as their dominant colour. They intended to dress in a specific colour so they would stand out and appear unified. They protested for early childhood reform in Ireland, advocating for more money, respect, and recognition for their work and services. According to the 'Together for Early Years Alliance', the underfunding of the childcare sector has reached a tipping point resulting in underpaid staff and unsustainable services. It has urged the next government to enhance financing in order to reduce parental costs, raise educator pay, support service sustainability, and to respect their profession or face further protests. The protest was organized by a

coalition of organizations including SIPTU, the Federation of Early Childhood Providers, the Association of Childhood Professionals, Seas Suas, and the National Community Childcare Forum. I joined the marchers as they chanted their way to Merrion Square opposite Dáil Éireann from Parnell Street in Dublin. As we approached Merrion Square, we heard speakers from various early childhood representative groups. The speakers pleaded with the Irish government for change and respect in the sector, with one Big Start representative declaring, "we will no longer be ignored" "today we are united for change" "we are not childminders, we are not childcare workers, we are early years professionals", "parents trust us with their most valuable possessions", "government must deliver now". But what struck me was one speaker's frequent statement that "women in this profession have had enough".

New Insights Covid-19

These protests were swiftly followed and overshadowed by the start of Covid-19 lockdowns in Ireland, which led to the closure of formal centre-based preschools. The newspapers and tabloids were flooded with headlines from the public outcry, including "I had to close, but it felt like we failed parents" (Murray 2020), "Crèches told to drop childcare fees in return for major bailout" (Ryan 2020), "Use empty cheches for children of frontline staff," (RTE newsroom 2020) and "A new cold reality: crèches face funding crisis" (Murray 2020). Centre-based preschools closed on March 13, 2020, owing to a level 5 Covid-19 lockdown. This caused a number of issues for parents, service providers, and early childhood educators. Parents who remained to work outside the house or switched to remote working from home needed to make alternate childcare arrangements. Several service providers continued to demand preschool fees in order to compensate their employees and avoid school closure. Early

Childhood Ireland encouraged preschool proprietors to exercise caution when charging fees to parents during this period. Early childhood educators who were not paid had to apply for the pandemic payment from social welfare, which was 350 euros per week (MacNamee 2020). Parents who were hosting an au pair in their home at the time had significant challenges. "I needed childcare, and I wanted my au pair to stay," one host mother explained, "but I had to offer her the option to go because we don't know how long this would last." On the other side, several au pair interlocutors were asked to leave their host families since their hosts did not require childcare during this time period, placing the au pair in a difficult position to arrange flights home or new lodging in Ireland. Despite this, several au pair participants in this study chose to stay and assist their host families throughout the lockdowns, and some au pairs arrived during Covid-19 lockdowns.

Conclusion:

Through this examination of Ireland's social, religious, and legislative structures, it is clear that childcare is tied up in these histories. The momentum generated by protests for improved childcare (funding etc) was cut short due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, childcare and rearing continue to be gendered, underpaid, and undervalued.

Within informal family networks, mothers have often been expected to assume childcare obligations. However, institutionalized abuse cases began to surface, and the introduction of legislated childcare in the 1990s was an important factor. Despite this advancement, childcare facilities faced significant obstacles such as a lack of flexibility, the high expense of formal childcare, and a failure to support the ideology that children should be raised predominantly at home. Au pairs play a critical role in supporting the childcare system in circumstances like these. While crèches may

make an effort to represent ideas of a homelike setting, they fall short in terms of flexibility and individualized care. The protest in Dublin serves as an example of how they also struggle with inadequate staffing and overcrowding.

The analysis of the childcare setting in Ireland emphasizes the complex relationships that connect it with the social, religious, and legislative frameworks. Despite setbacks, childcare continues to be gendered, underpaid, and undervalued. To illustrate how families navigate the intricate tapestry of care, I utilized the concept of care loops as an organizational tool. This approach integrates social policies and cultural factors, illustrating the localized loops inherent in childcare.

The chapters that follow will explore the experiences of parents and au pairs, illuminating many of the challenges they encounter in the hands of this intricate system through first-hand accounts of host families and au pairs navigating the realities of childcare.

Chapter Three: Before Contact: Au Pairing Imagined

It was a chilly wet Saturday in a residential neighbourhood on Dublin's Northside. On Lisa's day off, I had planned to meet her in a cafe. Lisa suggested this cafe because she liked its "vibe". The quirky café had music playing loudly in the background, and I wondered how I was going to hear Lisa over the din. Lisa was seated near the rear of the cafe, where the music wasn't too loud, and I recognized her from her Facebook images. "I love practicing my English with natives," she continued, clearly thrilled to meet me. We drank a lot of coffee and spoke for hours before going for a walk around the retail mall directly across the street from the café. Lisa was 19 when she became an au pair in Ireland. She is from Germany, twenty-one years old and has started university in Germany to train to become a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) in schools. She comes from an upper-middle class family in Germany. Lisa outlined her expectations and experiences in that early interview, and we have continued our conversations longitudinal via WhatsApp video calls and messaging. She also sends me regular voice notes to keep me up to date on her life. For the purposes of this chapter, I will solely discuss and highlight Lisa's au pairing expectations in Ireland before she contacted her host family and came to Ireland.

Ireland was not at the top of her au pair wish list. Lisa originally desired to see America, then the United Kingdom, and eventually Ireland. She remarked that Ireland was her final but correct option, but she didn't realize it at the time. She had a vivid image about au pairing in the "great United States of America". She did not like the idea of traveling so far to America so United Kingdom became an easier option but

"Brexit came - it wasn't actually there, but the plan of Brexit was - so then I decided to go to Ireland."

Interestingly, during a conversation with an AuPair World official, they mentioned that "Since Ireland changed the rules, we have seen a decline of registrations from host families. But the interest of au pairs to go to Ireland is even growing, due to the fact that after Brexit it is almost impossible for young Europeans to be an au pair in the UK and Ireland is a good alternative" (AuPair World 2022). According to an AuPair World representative, 20,000 au pairs were interested in working in Ireland in 2020, and this figure climbed to 38,000 in 2021. It should be noted that these figures are post Brexit and are during the Covid-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, Lisa was one of several au pair participants who chose Ireland over the United Kingdom due to Brexit. Once Lisa had officially decided on Ireland, she became excited and started to do some research on au pairing in the country.

> I was happy because I heard about the Irish friendly culture, and I had travelled there before as a teenager for 2 weeks and I loved the nature there. So, I was excited for the city and country in general and not the au pairing part, but it was exciting at the same time. it was so exciting to go to a country that everything is so green and so nice, and all the people are so friendly and so I expected to have a really friendly and open-minded host family because I met some Irish people before and then I thought it will be a good country to be an au pair because the people are so nice, and my family will be nice. I had no clue that there were so many au pairs in Ireland. I thought it was not a popular place for au pairs and that they would be in America or United Kingdom.

(Lisa 2020)

Lisa didn't imagine Ireland as the idealistic destination for au pairs because she didn't think there was a significant au pair diaspora in Ireland. Instead, she had imagined that the main influx of au pairs would be in the United Kingdom or United States of America. As Parreñas (2001) highlighted, the formation of imagined communities

among Filipino diaspora occurred through mass migrations across different geographical regions. What's noteworthy, is that Lisa had previously visited Ireland, and the element of imagined expectations had somewhat diminished. However, what persisted were her expectations of being placed with a friendly and relaxed host family.

Introduction

Imagined expectations are a recurring theme with most of participants involved in this research, in particular new au pairs and first-time host families. Lisa's narrative is not unique as the majority of au pair participants had an imaginary picture of Ireland, working in a clover filled, land of green, beautiful landscapes with friendly people drinking beer in pubs. First-time au pair participants had an imagined idea of what their time in Ireland would look like before arriving in Ireland and before contact with their host families. Similarly, first-time host families had an imagined expectation of an au pair fitting into their family or the convenience of having an au pair in the home.[25]

This chapter will look at the expectations of au pairs and host families (particularly mothers) and how their expectations diverge. These expectations occur before the au pair comes to Ireland and before the host family makes contact with a potential au pair. In doing this I ask a number of questions, such as how are au pairs' and host families' 'dreams' influenced by au pair agencies, the Irish government, or a combination of the two or other? Au pairs' expectations can be influenced by a wide variety of sources, from the media, films, music, social media to family and friends. Drawing from ethnographic data I illustrate how these influences aid in shaping their expectations.

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[25] The disjuncture's between experiences and expectations will be explored in Chapter Six.

Secondly, I ask who or what influences, what we might refer to as, "the imagined au pair" for the host family?[26] It is important to note that I use the term 'influences' because preconceived notions and expectations of Ireland and au pairing were formed through cultural influences, including but not limited to the media, but when considering becoming an au pair or host family, online research helps form their expectations.

In answering these questions, I will draw from ethnographic data from au pairs and host families. First, I will outline the social (demand for au pairs) and legal context (government legislation or lack thereof) in which au pairs and host families find themselves. Second, I will examine how au pair organisations and peers' experiences shape the expectations for au pairs and host families. Finally, I will use case studies of both au pairs and host families to demonstrate these influences. I will show what their expectations were before the au pair arrives in Ireland and before the host family meets the au pair using case studies of both au pairs and host families. I call this period 'before contact,' and this includes contact prior to the interview process and the first week of settling in, which will be addressed in Chapter Four. The case studies presented in this chapter only include participants' expectations of au pairing and hosting in Ireland.

Au Pairs in this Research

Given that more women are joining the workforce and cannot afford formalized childcare in Ireland, it would be reasonable to assume that au pairs in Ireland are filling a domestic gap in the home (see Smith 2015). However, as discussed in Chapter Two, it is not as easy to make the decision to have a 'stranger' in one's house purely on

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[26] See anthropological literature on imaginaries below.

economic reasoning. While this is an important consideration, cultural factors such as ideals of motherhood and structural factors such as family-friendly policies are influential components of the employment of au pairs. Before even choosing, interviewing, or meeting their au pair, host families that decide to 'hire' an au pair in their home conveyed to me their imagined expectations and commonly held assumptions. However, before arriving in Ireland, au pairs had their own set of imagined expectations about what the work entailed and what life in Ireland would be like.

Consider prevalent misunderstandings in much media about who au pairs are. Bruno Garotti's movie 'The Secret Diary of an Exchange Student' has been available on Netflix since 2021. This film tells the narrative of two Brazilian girls, one of whom dreams of visiting the United States of America. She works at a Brazilian airport selling travel magazines, hoping to travel one day. She noticed an advertisement for au pairing abroad and decided to apply for a visa to become an au pair and persuaded her friend to accompany her. Their journey is chronicled in this film, from leaving their hometown through their experiences working as au pairs in New York. It demonstrates the first difficulties of working as an au pair but also how their experiences develop through time and as they become a member of a family. It displays potential as well as restrictions, love, and adventure. What's crucial is that it presents the idea of an au pair from a less developed country seeking better prospects and possibly finding love. It illustrates widespread assumptions about au pairs, such that they are young, single, and seeking cultural experience to develop personally or linguistically. Similarly, it perpetuates the notion that their host families are financially stable, residing in spacious houses.

Based on this film, one could assume au pairs to be women from economically deprived regions working in the homes of affluent Irish women. Alternatively, one may consider an au pair in Ireland to be a youthful, vivacious, and 'sexy' European female on a gap year or cultural exchange program. While this is true for some au pairs, it does not provide a precise depiction. I would like to note that seven au pairs in this research were from non-EU countries such as, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Guatemala, Canada, and Zimbabwe, and 19 au pairs were from EU countries such as Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and Norway. All au pairs were from middle and upper-middle class backgrounds. [27] This runs counter to the widespread belief amongst informants before meeting their au pairs that au pairs are from underdeveloped countries or from lower socio-economic backgrounds. All au pairs had completed secondary level education, some had finished third level education, some were in third level whilst au pairing in Ireland and one au pair had 2 degrees from a university. I am noting this because none of my participants sent remittances back home, none had dependents in their home country and none of my non-EU participants came to Ireland for a better standard of living. This marks them as distinct from a lot of the research written about non-EU migrants undertaking domestic labour. Participants from less affluent countries in this research were from middle or upper-middle class backgrounds, as discussed in Chapter One.[28]

Instead, they came to enhance their longer-term careers and opportunities back home by receiving a proficient level of English. However, some au pairs have stayed in

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[27] See Chapter One for au pair profiles that include education, previous employment, and family backgrounds. It should be noted that there are no available statistics in Ireland on where au pairs originate. There is no au pair visa available. Instead, au pairs from EU countries enter freely without visa requirements and au pairs from non-EU countries predominantly get a student visa, work and travel visa and working holiday visa.

[28] See also 'Au Pair Migration - Traditional, New and Global Women' section in Chapter One.

Ireland and/or continued their studies here, but this was not their initial intention. The migration of women from the global south to the global north to 'fill a domestic gap' does not completely apply to my participants (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003; Hochschild, 2000; Parreñas, 2001).[29] It should be noted that some of the host families in this research chose au pairs because it was a more cost-effective choice, and au pairs did indeed 'fill a domestic gap' (as I will explore through Mary's case study below), but for some host families, personal ideologies and cultural considerations played a role (see Chapter Two).

Western (European) au pairs, according to Geserick (2016), are frequently young graduates leaving home for the first time. They are in the process of creating their identities and fulfilling developmental tasks such as being self-assured and peer- and partner-focused. Correspondingly, in early work Geserick (2012) discovered that additional incentives, such as acquiring language skills, traveling 'into the foreign' (pull factors), or temporarily abandoning their familiar environments (push factor), had influenced the German and Austrian au pairs' decision to pursue the au pair programme in the United States of America. These push and pull factors become more important than the work of an au pair, which is to care for children.

As mentioned above, au pairs have imagined what their experience will be like before they arrive in Ireland. Their host families will also have imagined what having an au pair will provide to their family and quality of life. These separate sets of imaginaries contribute to a separate set of expectations which will have been partially addressed through AuPair World's website, contract, and phone and video calls before the au pair's arrival. Therefore, an exploration of anthropological literature concerning the

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[29] See Chapter One for more detail.

imagination is important here as it informs, leads to, and contributes to the literature on expectations. Therefore, before delving into wider academic literature concerning expectations of au pairs and host families, it is essential to provide a brief discussion of anthropological research on the 'imagination.'

Anthropology and Imagination

> "Imagination," "imaginaries," the "imagined": the individual mental capacity to envision, but more so the processes, products, and projections of individually and collectively imagining are in vogue in the social sciences.
>
> (Rohrer & Thompson, 2023:187)

There is an abundance of scholarly literature that relies on various conceptualizations of terms such as imagination, imaginaries, the imagined, etc. (see Mclean, 2007; Sneath et al, 2009; Stankiewicz, 2016; Strauss, 2006). Additionally, there have been previous explorations of the topic of imagination from the vantage point of anthropology (Harris and Rapport, 2015; Sneath et al, 2009; Strauss, 2006). Anthropologists have however faced some critical remarks in the usage of these terms. Strankiewicz (2016: 797) argues that anthropologists have given little "attention to the nuanced distinctions between 'imagination,' 'imaginaries,' 'to imagine,' 'the imaginaire,' and so forth". Drawing inspiration from the critique by Strankiewicz, anthropologists Rohrer & Thompson (2023) state that these terms are often used hastily but rather than abandoning them, they argue they should be developed and strengthened.

Rohrer & Thompson (2023:189) introduce a three-part classification within the broader concept of imagination. This classification aims to account for three separate delineations, recognizing that clear demarcations are not always evident in anthropological research. Therefore, their intention behind this approach is to avoid

relying solely on a single, restrictive definition of imagination. The three-part classifications are:

> 1. The human capacity to (re-)create something which is not materially present, often- times described as imagination.
>
> 2. The active process of creating, most frequently described with the adjective imaginative or the verb imagining.
>
> 3. The individual and/or social products of such a creative process, usually referred to as images or the imagined. We locate *imaginaries* in this category as a special form of shared, pseudo-institutionalized set of norms or values within a society which emerge over time from the creative, collective process of imagining. (Rohrer & Thompson, 2023:189).

Scholars from diverse fields have analysed conceptions about the imagination (Brann, 1991; Kearney, 1988). Anthropologist Claudia Strauss (2006) contends that imaginaries can be understood as responses to cultural ethos (Castoriadis, 1987), or as cohesive and shared foundational concepts within a society. These imaginaries also arise as reactions to psychological needs, giving rise to fantasy (Lacan, 1977), and can be viewed as implicitly shared cognitive frameworks or cultural models (Anderson, 1983; Taylor, 2004). Castoriadis, Lacan, Anderson, and Taylor employ the term "imaginary" in distinct way: Castoriadis (1987) interprets it as a society's cultural ethos, Lacan views it as a fantasy, and Anderson and Taylor perceive it as a cultural model, which is a learned and shared implied cognitive schema. Hence, for imagination to employ its effectiveness, it must be connected to reality (Lennon 2015). Therefore, people create "socioculturally, peoples and places as mixtures of the assumed 'real' and the imaginary" (Salazar 2020: 3).

Anderson's (1983) focus is on a concept that has extended far beyond the boundaries of any particular group, specifically the concept of the nation. Anderson placed a significant focus on vernacular print language and print media, which played a pivotal role in constructing a shared feelings by imagining that readers shared language,

concerns, and other features. These imagined communities, consequently, played a pivotal role in establishing fresh identities and political alliances. In his widely recognized formulation, Anderson defines a nation as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson, 1983:15). Here, Anderson's work would align closely with Rohrer & Thompson classification in which his participants actively create an identity which is not materially present (the nation).

Building on Anderson's (1983) 'Imagined Communities' work, Appadurai (1996: 33) states that, "imagined worlds" can be perceived as a cognitive process, both individual and societal, generating the reality that it concurrently produces. Appadurai (ibid: 33) examines five aspects of global cultural movements and labels them as "(a) ethnoscapes, (b) mediascapes, (c) technoscapes, (d) financescapes, and (e) ideoscapes." Ethnoscapes encompass persons shaping the changing world we inhabit, including tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and various mobile groups and individuals. Hence, the movement of people can influence politics within and among nations. Technoscapes, involve the global fluid arrangement of technology swiftly traversing borders, with different countries serving as the roots for multinational enterprises. The economy is propelled by intricate connections among currency movements, political prospects, and the presence or absence of skilled labour. Financescapes, refer to the global capital landscape marked by the rapid flow of substantial "megamonies" between national markets. Thus, characterized by unpredictability stemming from the disconnected relationship between ethnoscapes, technoscapes, and financescapes (ibid: 34).

Further complicating these disparities are mediascapes and ideoscapes. Mediascapes involve the global distribution of electronic tools for creating and spreading

information and images, such as newspapers and television stations. These images and information can provide "repertoires of images, narratives, and ethnoscapes to viewers throughout the world, in which the world of commodities and the world of news and politics are profoundly mixed" (Appadurai 1996: 35). Consequently, the distinction between reality and fiction becomes less clear, particularly as audiences move or are further away from the collection of images and information, making them more likely to construct "imagined worlds." Ideoscapes represent collections of images primarily of ideological nature, closely tied to the "political ideologies of states and the counter-ideologies of movements" seeking to acquire state power. These ideoscapes consist of components stemming from "the Enlightenment worldview, which consists of a chain of ideas, terms, and images, including freedom, welfare, rights, sovereignty, representation, and the master term democracy." (ibid: 36) These elements form master-narratives shaping state politics, albeit being interpreted and employed in diverse ways.

I draw inspiration from Benedict Anderson's work, "Imagined Communities" (1983), as it provides a foundation for comprehending the shared, imagined expectations amongst my participants. However, it is important to acknowledge the critiques put forth by Herzfeld (1992, 2005) regarding Anderson's ideas. Herzfeld states that while the concept of the nation is indeed imagined, the imagining of a specific nation carries a deeper thoroughness of detail. Departing from Anderson's top-down approach, Herzfeld aims to explore not only how nations are imagined but also how these visions are embraced by the very individuals who are homogenized within these constructs. With this in mind, I will follow the tripartite classification proposed by Rohrer & Thompson (2023) and Appadurai's (1996) five dimensions of the "imagined worlds" in particular 'mediascapes'. Therefore, I explore the imagined expectations of au pairs

and host families from various perspectives. This exploration will encompass what participants have articulated as their imagined expectations, the influential factors that shape these expectations, and societal values associated with au pairing as reflected on governmental websites.

However, now I will turn to researchers who employ the term 'imagined' and or 'imaginary' to au pairing and/or domestic work with inspiration from Benedict Anderson (1983). Drawing upon Benedict Anderson's characterization of the nation, Parreñas (2001:12) asserts that within the context of Filipina domestic workers in Rome and Los Angeles, "The imagined global community of Filipina migrants emerges, in part, from the simultaneity of their similar experiences as domestic workers across geographic territories." Parreñas argues that the dislocation encountered in labour migration gives rise to these reciprocal experiences, and the exchange of these dislocations facilitates the emergence of an envisioned global community. These dislocations encompass aspects like "partial citizenship, the pain of family separation, the experience of contradictory class mobility, and the feeling of social exclusion or nonbelonging in the migrant community" (Parreñas, 2001: 12). Nevertheless, drawing inspiration from De Certeau, Parreñas observed that this 'imagined global community' does not exclusively stem from shared experiences but emerges through the ongoing travel across or through geographical territories in the process of migration. My au pair participants have discussed similar experiences of connectedness through their shaped experience as au pairs while in Ireland.

Parreñas' work echoes Appadurai (1996), who contends that imagination isn't a detached fantasy but is intertwined with actions. Regarding 'mediascapes,' as mentioned earlier this concept pertains to the realm of electronically dispersed images and information by both private and public entities worldwide. These media outlets

generate a vast collection of images, narratives, and 'ethnoscapes' for viewers globally. The distinction between real and fictional images and landscapes becomes blurred, giving rise to the creation of 'imaginary worlds.' An example of this action as Parreñas notes that print media, such as magazines, can serve as a medium for constructing concepts of a worldwide community and implanting a portrayal of their experience.

Likewise, Bridget Anderson (2014) employs the term 'imagined' and makes a fleeting reference to Benedict Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities.' Anderson (2014:6) argues that

> States are represented as having to act in the 'national interest,' which is imagined as different from the interests of the state per se. It is important to recognize that when it comes to immigration policies, states must be seen as prioritizing the interests of the 'nation' and 'the people' in ways that go beyond simply a response to the demands of capital.

However, in Anderson's (2014) analysis, immigration regulations and practices significantly influence the experiences of various visa holders in the UK, specifically au pairs and domestic workers. Anderson contends that domestic workers are imagined primarily as employees, a perception constructed by immigration controls. Although domestic workers perform similar tasks to au pairs, the au pair regime in Ireland is imagined as the movement of young women, who are primarily middle-class, at a specific life stage with no clearly defined long-term migratory plans. Additionally, they are perceived as individuals who are meant to become integrated into a host family as part of a cultural exchange program.

The concept of cultural exchange is 'imagined' by both host families and au pairs in this study, yet their perceptions of it may vary. The anthropological literature discussed earlier helps us grasp how realities can be shaped by what is imagined. Au pairs may 'imagine' their time in Ireland through the overarching idea of 'cultural

exchange,' influenced by information and images encountered through various platforms. In interviews, au pairs have expressed sentiments like "I look forward to visiting the Cliffs of Moher," "I plan to practice English with Irish people in a pub," "I want to make Irish friends," "I am excited to eat many potatoes," and "I want to try Guinness for the first time." In contrast, host families articulated expectations such as "I will have more free time," "I want my children to learn Spanish," and "I hope she can cook nice food" (referring to an au pair from Italy). However, as I will delineate below, these 'imagined' expectations are influenced by factors including, but not limited to, au pair agencies.

Cultural exchange

Cultural exchange can have different connotations for au pairs and host families. The concept of au pairing involves some form of 'cultural exchange,' and this can differ in meaning for au pairs and host families. For example, some au pairs think of cultural exchange as learning a new language; visiting museums, landmarks, historical and cultural sites; learning about family norms in a different country; making new friends and trying different cuisine. Some host families may consider the idea of cultural exchange to be a hindrance on their everyday life and other hosts may think of it as "enriching their children's lives" and some think of it as an opportunity to take their au pair to various locations around Ireland, as a fun "family outing." The notion of cultural exchange – "the thing that is meant to define au pairing, remediate for poor pay and enable some kind 'equal' social status between au pairs and hosts" (Cox and Busch: 81).

The Au Pair Bill (2016)[30] attempts to define au pairing as a cultural exchange rather than a substitute for childcare. However, since the Bill failed to pass, the Irish government considers au pair work to be domestic labour, which is entitled to a minimum wage. However, not all politicians support the existing status of au pairs as domestic workers. Frances Fitzgerald is a Fine Gael Irish politician who now represents the Dublin constituency in the European Parliament. "The au-pair system has historically been and should continue to be viewed as an educational and cultural experience for the person visiting, rather than an alternative for childcare," she remarked during a Dail Eireann debate in 2017. On December 11th, 2019, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar[31] stated in a Dáil Éireann debate that informal care in homes provided by childminders, grandparents, neighbours, and au pairs should not be a regulated system because families would find themselves in situations where they could not afford care for their children and result in leaving the labour market.

> We do not want to over-regulate, undermine or get rid of that system because if we did, it would be a disaster. Tens of thousands of people would find that they did not have any way to look after their children and might have to leave the workplace. This would then make it harder for them to pay the rent or mortgage so we definitely do not want to over-regulate or be too heavy-handed in any reforms we introduce in this area. At the same time, we need to put children first and we cannot ignore the fact that some children are being minded in homes that are not very safe and they could get injured. There are health and safety issues in those houses that are providing informal childcare at the moment   (Varadkar 2019)

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[30] See Chapter One for more information the The Au Pair Bill (2016).

[31] Leo Varadkar is an Irish Fine Gael politician who has been Taoiseach since December 2022 for the second time, after previously serving as Taoiseach and Minister for Defense from 2017 to 2020. Leo Varadkar has been Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade, and Employment since June 2020 (Gov.ie 2022)

The quote by Leo Varadkar above is particularly intriguing because, on the one hand, the removal of the term 'au pair' was introduced in order to protect au pairs and ensure they were paid minimum wage, but on the other hand, the government does not want to over-regulate this system, leaving it entirely up to families to register their au pair for Pay As You Earn (PAYE)[32] if they earn more than forty euro per week. As previously stated, all au pairs in this study earned more than forty euros per week, but it was termed 'pocket money,' therefore no host families disclosed their au pair stay to the Irish revenue. This is something that host families are free to do as they see fit. Additionally, the Irish government is no longer held accountable.

What au pairs or families anticipate?

Cox and Busch (2018) analysed over one thousand advertisements on gumtree.com to show how government and agency guidance translates into norms and expectations of au pairs and their hosts. They seek to answer these questions "what do au pairs really do? What do their hosts think they should do? And to what extent is this really a relationship of guest and host rather than employer and employee?" (Cox and Busch 2018: 81). Similar to Smith (2015) they look at au pairing as poorly paid childcare labour, yet they acknowledge that some au pairs benefit from this experience by developing skills, create relationships and networking, instead of viewing au pairing as an unproblematic example of cultural exchange between equals. By examining advertising on gumtree.com Cox and Busch (2018) investigate the vocabulary used to characterize this sort of labour and how it differs from other types of childcare and domestic workers. For instance, examining these adverts also allowed Cox and Busch to determine if there was a clear separation between nanny (work) and au pair (non-

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[32] See Registration of employers for Pay As You Earn (PAYE) (revenue.ie)

work) jobs. Their assessment of the adverts found a lack of clear differences between au pair roles and paid childcare positions such as nannies, which is consistent with findings addressed by Anderson 2000, Anderson et al. 2006, Cox 2006, and Oien 2009. Because of the deregulation of au pairing, it appears that the lower end of nanny labour has been absorbed by the phrase 'au pair,' leaving only the most highly skilled and compensated nannies distinguishable from au pairs. The advertising provided Cox and Busch (2018) with a snapshot of the kind of connections that host families had been searching for. The host families wanted to give a good impression to au pairs and claimed that they were friendly and welcoming hosts by using terminology such as 'fun,' 'friendly,' and 'loving' (ibid: 94). Some advertisements were written by au pairs that recommended their host family for a replacement au pairs. Interestingly, a limited number of advertisements mentioned that the au pair would be treated as a member of the family and some stated that they were looking for a 'big sister' for their children (see Hess and Puckhaber 2004).

The fictive kinship terminology used in advertisements may indicate an imagined au pair becoming part of the family. [33] However, not all host families presented themselves online to be welcoming, friendly or wanted a familial relationship, instead they outlined clear boundaries such as "When you are not working you must be out or in your room so that the family can have some time together" (Cox and Busch 2018: 94-95). Similarly with my participants, I found that experienced host families (see Chapter Seven) knew what they were looking for and advertised accordingly to narrow down their search for a suitable au pair. As Miranda [host mother] explained-

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[33] See Chapter Six for more information on fictive kinship, pseudo families and anthropological literature on kinship.

When we were recruiting au pairs on Au PairWorld, we would filter search words like, Warm and sincere to find au pairs that describe themselves like that. We would email over and back, and I'd ask questions like- are your family supportive of your decision, do you have health issues that you like to tell us, do you need time off for studying? A lot of the Brazilians as well that apart of their visa they have to be in a language school every day so when we had infants that wasn't an option, so we'd filter that. We are meat eater so if they are vegetarian, we cut that out. We said we are practising Catholics but wouldn't be forced on anyone but to be aware we had holy water and sacred heart pictures in the house. So, then we just say respect our home and family and in return we'd respect them. and we never had an issue there.

(Miranda 2020)

However, these advertisements analyses by Cox and Busch (2018) were aimed at a particular imagined au pair for host families. The positive language used in adverts stressed the positive affective dimension to the job, indicating it is a lifestyle and not a job. This can be connected to the terminology used by au pair agencies, Facebook adverts and the defeated 'Au Pair Placement Bill' (see Chapter One), that predominately define au pairing under the umbrella of cultural exchange instead of a profession. Since my au pair participants and host families avoided using gumtree.com, I did not analyse its advertisements for this study. Instead, I'll demonstrate how au pair agencies construct an imagined au pair and what host families and au pairs were seeking in advertisements on Facebook. In the next section, I will examine the case study of Lily.

Au Pair Expectations

Lily like Lisa (see above) fit under the description of young, European au pairs coming to Ireland after high school on a gap year before figuring out what they want to study in college. Before this period of self-development, a gap year and/or a rite of passage (Búriková and Miller 2010), they had an image and expectation of what au pairing

would be like in Ireland. They both represent a temporal image that derived from contact with agencies, websites, media, and television.

Case study: Lily

Lily was 20 years old when she started her au pair journey in Ireland. After two years of au pairing, she is living back in Germany studying nutrition and she is flat sharing in a different city than her home city in Germany. During our online conversation, Lily wore a perpetual smile, and her voice carried a polite, somewhat reserved demeanour. She is from an upper-middle class background in Germany (this is based on Lily's parents' incomes, education, assets, and professions). Her dad is an architect, and her mom is a real-estate agent. She had just finished secondary school and her mother wanted her to travel before starting college, she claimed "my mom pushed me to travel but I left it last minute, so au pairing was my only option". She originally wanted to volunteer with animals in Chile because that's what her older sister had previously done but she missed the deadlines for applications for programs like this that cost a lot of money, even though her parents were happy to pay for it. She intended to take some time off before entering college to strengthen her English abilities, but Lily noted that it was never even discussed in her house since her mother wanted her to travel somewhere outside of Germany for a year as soon as she finished school. Her mom said, "you have to go somewhere now, this is your time to do it." Lily was not sure on a location for au pairing, but two friends went to Ireland for holidays and told her that "the landscape is so beautiful and there is so much to see and visit and the people are so friendly." She recalled that "older members of my family told me that the Irish are so funny, and they love to drink lots of beers, so I had a good picture of Ireland in my mind before even landing there." As a result, Lily put Ireland at the top of her list. She

also researched au pairing in Ireland on agencies websites and newspaper articles. However, before coming to Ireland she was afraid because she read a newspaper article about a Spanish au pair in Dublin suing her host family for exploiting her[34].

Lily was not the only au pair that expressed concerns about au pairing. The majority of my au pair participants were concerned about exploitation before coming to Ireland, which is not unexpected given that the majority of au pairing literature focuses on this issue and press coverage is generally negative (Smith 2015; MRCI 2016). She had another friend that went to England to be an au pair and Lily did not want to "copy her" and she stated, "that London is so basic, everyone does London." She did not find London appealing because she felt it has been overdone and did not spark enough excitement for her to go. She wanted to go to an English-speaking country in Europe that is not too far from her family in Germany.

Ireland was a first choice for Lily based on what family members told her and what she had seen and researched on agency websites. She had a stereotypical image of Ireland before coming here. Lily became concerned about the 'job' of au pairing, which is care labour, after doing some research. This, however, had little bearing on her decision since the pull of Ireland outweighed her fears. This relates to Geserick (2012) research that the pull factors are mostly connected to cultural aspects and not the actual work of au pairing. Au Pairs are attracted to "the foreign" and "the unknown" and this can be seen in Lily's case study (Geserick 2012: 57).

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[34] In 2016 a Spanish au pair won a historic lawsuit against an Irish host family and is now being classified as an employee. The WRC determined that the family violated various employment rules, including not paying her the minimum wage. The family accepted the verdict and paid the commission's order of €9,229 in total. https://www.rte.ie/news/2016/0308/773336-au-pair-ruling/

Similarly, Búriková and Miller (2010), found that Slovakian au pairs' behaviour can be better understood by considering their time in London as a 'rite of passage' (Van Gennep 1960; Turner 1967) that reveals them to the ubiquitous dichotomy of temporary freedoms against long-term responsibilities that prevails in contemporary society. They claim that au pairs typically characterize their stay in London as a period of self-development and maturation, a step between living with their parents and possibly preparing for parenthood. According to Van Gennep (1960) rites of passage are composed of three subcategories: rites of separation, transition rites and rites of incorporation, also referred to as Separation, liminality, and incorporation. Separation involves the individual being separated by their previous identity or status. Liminality refers to a transitional period where the individual is in a state of ambiguity and marginality, neither fully divided from their previous identity nor fully incorporated into their new one. Incorporation involves the individual being re-introduced into society with a new formed identity. Turner (1967) built upon the middle stage of liminality and describes liminality as a state of marginality, ambiguity and that during this stage, individuals are "betwixt and between" between their old self and their new self. This is a period of test and trials that some people feel they must endure. Búriková and Miller (2010) state that au pairs do not use the term rite of passage to describe their stay in London but,

> They too can come to understanding of being an au pair that is close to this conception- that they both excuse and explain their behaviour while in London as a stage rather than as an ordinary or normal part of their life and that, for some, what they appear to be in London is more or less the precise opposite of what they expect to be when they return.
>
> (Búriková and Miller 2010: 168)

Similar to Búriková and Miller (2010) the phrase 'rite of passage' was not used amongst my research participants, but the emphasis was on the cultural exchange

associated with au pairing. Some au pairs referred to their experience as a "gap year" before making career and college choices, as well as to improve their language skills. These factors can all fall under the umbrella of cultural exchange.

How do au pairing agencies represent and create an imaginary au pair?

Au pair agencies provide a definition of au pairing, paint a picture of what au pairing would be like, and at the same time connect au pairs with host families and vice versa. Most participants involved in this study relied more on what the agencies said au pairing would be and did not read any official government documents. AuPair World (online agency see below) was the most popular website amongst my participants. Also, when written contracts were used most host families used the template provided by AuPair World[35].

The structural content found within au pair agencies frequently encompasses information that constructs an imagined diaspora of the au pair community. This information can present idealized depictions and anticipations for both au pairs and host families. Benedict Anderson (1983:62) noted print media's ability to create expectations of community when discussing early American newspapers:

> To put it differently, what united, within the same newspaper page, the concept of marriage with the arrival of a ship, the cost of goods with the presence of a bishop, was the inherent structure of the colonial administration and the market system. In this manner, the Caracas newspaper naturally and even without a political agenda, cultivated an imagined community among a specific group of fellow-readers. They were individuals to whom these ships, brides, bishops, and prices belonged. With time, it was only to be expected that political aspects would come into play.
>
> (Anderson, 1983:62)

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[35] According to AuPair World, there is no formal contract for au pairs in Ireland, but they provide the European template contract for Irish host families. (See Council of Europe - Model Text of Agreement relating to an au pair (AuPair World.com))

Hence, this underscores the significance of vernacular print languages and print media (including newspapers, book, and more recently online media) in shaping a reader's perception of being part of a wider community of alleged readers who share the same language and apprehensions. This stands in contrast to parallel imagined communities of readers in other places, reading in different languages or focusing on different issues.

The potential influence of media and websites to create a misleading idea of what au pairing will be like is not lost on Kate[36] who owns an au pair agency in County Laois, Ireland and is affiliated with IAPA and APAC[37]. Kate was a legislative advocate for the Au Pair Bill as well as a founding member of "the council". I decided to contact Kate to better understand why the legislation wasn't passed and I wanted to see how she imagined au pairing in Ireland. Kate informed me her au pair agency is defunct. She angrily stated, "we are not doing it anymore it is illegal". She noted that because the Irish government does not see au pairing as a cultural exchange, they see it as work under the category of domestic work that au pairs are not protected or recruited by agencies anymore and "everything is done underground through Facebook and AuPair World. Their protection in Ireland has been taken away and so has their cultural experience and so many au pair agency business". Kate is referring to herself, the agency, as a protector through representation for au pairs. Kate said that placing au pairs under the category as domestic workers earning minimum wage does more harm than good because they don't become a member of the family, and they are treated different as employers. This removes obligation from host families to give them a cultural experience and treat them as family members. "They no longer become an

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[36] For the sake of anonymity, Kate is a Pseudonym.
[37] See Chapter One.

older daughter and now au pairing is illegal". She stated that au pairs and host families are not Garda Vetted on Facebook and could be "paedophiles or nut cases" coming into your home or au pairs could be "unlucky in a bad host family with no protection of agencies".

My conversation with Kate revealed that she considers an au pair to be a part of a cultural exchange and a member of the family, that should be safeguarded by accredited agencies. AuPair World and Facebook, she believes, are not "suitable, safe, or legal" platforms for both host families and au pairs to use. As a result, she asserted, the term au pair "is prohibited in Ireland since they should be classified as domestic workers". Au pairing is still prevalent in Ireland, according to my findings, au pairs expect and imagine their experience to be part of a cultural exchange. Host families also use the term 'au pair' and are aware of the notion of cultural exchange.

In May 2022, I decided to contact AuPair World to learn about their au pair expectations in Ireland. The following is a portion of the interview transcript:

> *Researcher:* Is AuPair World affiliated with the (IAPA) The International Au Pair Association?
>
> *AuPair World representative:* AuPair World is not affiliated with the IAPA since we are not a traditional au pair agency. You might have seen on our website that we don't make any placements but give au pairs and host families worldwide the opportunity to match directly on the website, to get in touch with each other and to organize the au pair stay themselves, using the resources and information they can find on our website as well.
>
> Researcher: It is not clear if au pairing is a cultural exchange program or domestic work in Ireland, was this difficult to portray on your website? and do you think Irish families and au pairs coming to Ireland are aware of this blurry definition?
>
> *AuPair World representative:* For the major host countries, we provide all the relevant and correct information about the au pair program for each country. In our section Info Host Countries au pairs and host families can inform themselves about the details, like pocket money (or in case of Ireland the applicable minimum wage), au pair duties, contract, insurance etc. In our

opinion, au pairing is clearly a form of cultural exchange. You can see that reflected in our basic idea of au pairing which is part of our terms of service.

AuPair World is an online agency for au pairs and host families. It is free for au pairs to post their profiles and search for host families. Host families have to pay to post their profile, this is a once off payment for 39.90 euro for one month, 69.90 euro for 3 months or 129.90 euro for 12 months. AuPair World was the most popular and utilised recruitment and information website for both my au pairs and host families. Even au pairs and host families that used Facebook for recruitment purposes also used AuPair World for information about their position as an au pair and a host family. AuPair World state that

> The main objective behind an au pair stay is a mutual cultural exchange which benefits both parties: The au pair brings a new culture, a foreign language, and a whiff of the big wide world into the host family. And whilst in the host country, the au pair can learn the official language of the host country and gain valuable experience with the help of their host families and by attending a language course. For this reason, child minding in one's own country does not count as an au pair stay.
>
> (AuPair World n.d)

AuPair World provide expectations for both au pairs and host families in their brief definition of au pairing. This contrasts with the 'Au Pair Agencies Council of Ireland' definition which is a one-sided overview for au pair expectations with an emphasis on learning a language. AuPair World provide a section entitled 'Au pair stay in Ireland' in this section they state that Ireland has no formal recognition of au pairing unlike other European countries and

> In the absence of such recognition, the only relevant official regulations governing the status of young persons in Ireland who have joined Irish families as au pairs are administered by the Workplace Relations Commission. The Workplace Relations Commission views au pairs as workers and the families that host them as employers. On this basis, the WRC maintains that the Minimum Wage regulations detailed here should be applied to au pairs. Despite these requirements, we at AuPair World continue to view au pairing as a form of cultural exchange that works through integration of a young person

into family life. The information provided on these pages and throughout our website is based on this idea, our Basic idea of au pairing.

(AuPair World 2022)

In this study, host families struggle to understand what is expected of them as hosts. They are given contradictory information from government websites and agencies. On the one hand, AuPair World claims that minimum pay should be paid to au pairs in Ireland in line with the WRC (Workplace Relations Commission) recommendation, but on the other hand, this might be overlooked and considered as a cultural exchange and opportunity to become a family member in exchange for housing and pocket money. Hence, this conflicting information underscores the ambiguity that host families and au pairs encounter while attempting to 'imagine' their expectations.
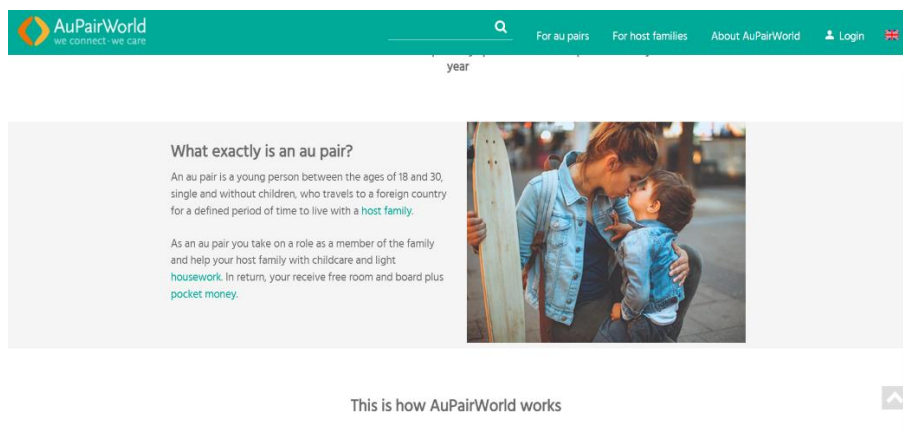
Figure 6: Picture taken from AuPair World

The image above is a screen shot taken from the website AuPair World, it is posted under the category 'Become an au pair and have the time of your life.' The above image shows a young happy woman (the au pair), displaying affection towards a child (the hosts family's child). The au pair is holding a skateboard in one hand, possibly indicating that she is sporty and having a good time whilst caring for a mutually

affectionate child. This image can project romanticised expectations to au pairs and host families.

Figure 7: Picture taken from AuPair.com

The above image is from AuPair.com[38] it was posted under the heading "Au Pair in Ireland: Guided tour." It is projecting the green landscape imagery that was illuminated by my au pair participants. AuPair.com is another online agency that advertises Ireland for au pairing. AuPair.com also makes the claim that au pairs should be paid at minimum wage levels and can work up to forty-eight hours per week. However, they also state that au pairing should be viewed as a cultural exchange "that represents a mutual cooperation between an Au Pair and a Host Family" (AuPair.com n.d). Interestingly, AuPair.com paints an image of Ireland for au pairs. They state that Ireland is known for its clovers and the colour green, and it is one of the most beautiful countries in Europe. They refer to Irish landscapes as green meadows and cliffs that can tickle all the senses. They use popular television series like Game of Thrones and Vikings to entice au pairs to visit these film sets and state that Irish people are known

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[38] AuPair.com was not used by my participants to find a host family or au pair but it was used for research purposed for both au pair and host families.

for their friendly and welcoming personalities. AuPair.com emphasizes Irish stereotypes, and these stereotypes have been echoed by au pair participants in this study. AuPair World (see screenshot from website below) also exhibit Ireland as a green landscape that was a backdrop for famous television shows. Rosalee (27-year-old au pair from France) said "I was watching Outlanders; you know the Scottish TV show, and I loved the landscape so I looked up au pairing jobs in Scotland and I couldn't find many families so I thought Ireland would have similar landscapes and green countryside and I was sold after doing some research". Despite the fact that Ireland was not Rosalee's first choice it became the next best thing to Scotland because there was a lot more demand for au pairs here. She used AuPair World to find her host family but also AuPair.com for additional research.
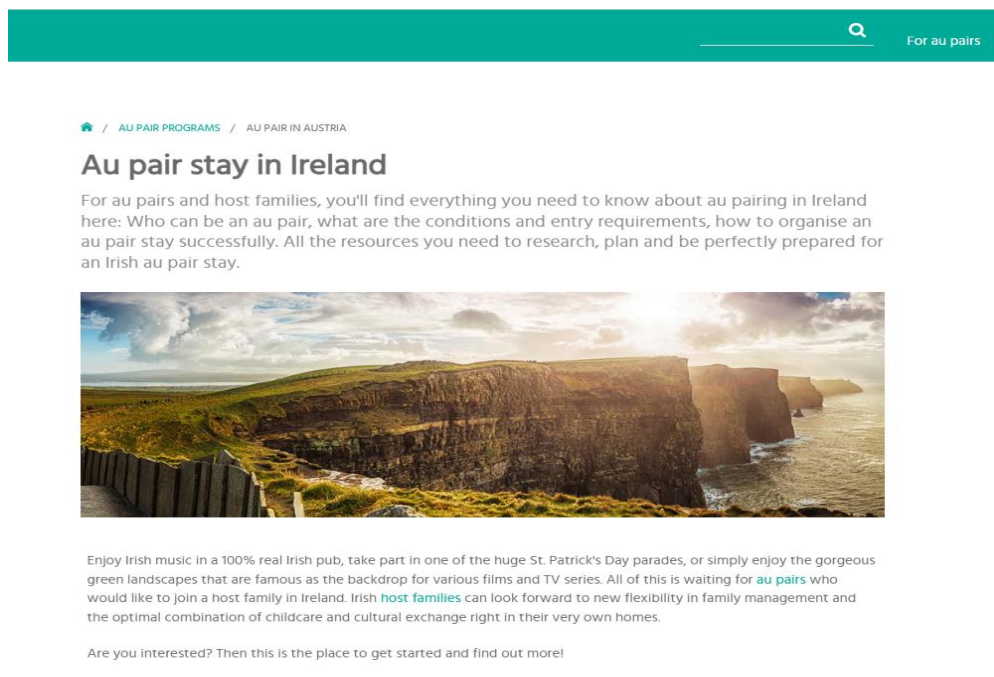

Figure 8: Picture taken from AuPair World

Host families have this idealistic vision of the help they will receive with childcare and home responsibilities, with the aim of imposing as little as possible on their day-

to-day life and autonomy. Au pairs also have this idea of cultural exchange, to be a valued part of the household, treated as an adult but at the same time welcomed into a family. The imagery posted on agencies websites gives au pairs an imagined green geographic locale preference to visit and provide host families with an ideal image of an au pair joining their family.[39]

Similar, to Rosalee and Lily, and influenced by au pair agency websites, Lisa expected everything to be green and for the Irish people to be friendly. Lisa, like Lily, stated that the actual job of au pairing was not a pull factor in her decision-making progress. Cultural exchange was the allure. Lisa also stated that she decided to watch Irish television shows to understand the Irish accent because this was something that worried her and that she would not be able to communicate with her host family. She said the accent was so strong and Germans were not used to the Irish accent, but she said, "it turns out it wasn't too hard ha-ha." She had an image of her host family being very wealthy because she felt that families who could afford an au pair must be rich. She expected to be paid minimum wage based on the conflicting information provided by AuPair World and newspaper articles but at the same time was not too optimistic about it because her friend told her that au pairing is a cheap solution to childcare.

> Before I came to Ireland, I thought that it was so expensive for families to get an au pair. I thought they must be so rich. And it is a big financial step to get a foreign person in your house to care for your children and care about them. But then my friend told me that it is cheaper for families in Ireland to get an au pair than the normal caring system. I was shocked but I was expected a really rich family to host me.

(Lisa 2020)

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[39] It should be noted that the terminology used by agencies and The Au Pair Bill to describe the au pair's pay is 'pocket money.' This is a phrase in Ireland usually given to a child's monetary reward.

From my data and the case studies above, au pairs are often well-educated, come from upper middle-class families, are in some cases young, and do not have children of their own. They are rarely driven just by a desire to make money; instead, they may prefer to pursue some type of personal development, such as increasing their language abilities or achieving personal growth through independent travel.

The greenness of Ireland and the friendly people are popular stereotypes of Ireland and agencies portray this stereotypical image to au pairs creating a preferred geographic locale even if Ireland was not their first choice. This is similar to Geserick (2016) discussion of middle-class German and Austrian au pairs going to the USA to experience the 'American dream' encapsulates the imagined expectations of au pairing as a cultural exchange and a fun adventure in 'America, the beautiful' (ibid: 247). Geserick codes seven dimensions coining au pairs expectations and experiences. These seven dimensions are 1. American landmarks; 2. American shapes; 3. Food and eating habits; 4. Interaction; 5. Parenting; 6. American society; 7 Images and reality. Using Moscovici's (1961) concept of figurative kernel, Geserick suggests that the contents of the images and seven dimensions are connected by the term 'grandness', in both positive and negative connotations. Au pairs do not use the term 'grandness' to describe Ireland or Irish people but instead use key words like green and friendly.

The perception of Ireland as an attractive place to live is enough to disguise the nature of au pair work and many of the au pairs interviewed described being an au pair – undertaking low-paid domestic work often for long hours – as the price they were prepared to pay to be in Ireland. As Cox & Busch (2016) argue that the allure of seeing such prominent locations as New York or London might obscure the monotony of au pair work. Similarly, Pérez's (2015) examination of the 'cosmopolitan conundrum'

encountered by Mexican women working as au pairs in the United States most succinctly summarizes the impact of au pairing as a kind of cultural interaction. She argues that the opportunity to travel the world while living in a dynamic cosmopolitan metropolis entices Mexican young women to au pair. Their Facebook pages are full of images of them visiting prominent tourist destinations in New York and other cities, which are viewable to friends and family at home. Many au pairs, on the other hand, have a separate internet identity that is unknown to their Mexican families but is shared with other au pairs in the US. In this second part, they discuss the daily grind of au pairs, conflicts with hosts, tantrums from children, and the reality of life fulfilling household responsibilities. While participants involved in this research did not have two separate Facebook accounts, they did however place an emphasis on cultural exchange as a pull factor rather than the work of au pairing, especially before arriving in Ireland.

As previously said, it is simple to deduce that host families use the concept of cultural exchange to obtain low-cost childcare. According to Bikova (2008), the value of cultural exchange may be underestimated by host families, who primarily prioritize at home childcare. Bikova notes that many au pair participants encounter a reality different from their initial expectations once they assume their role. She argues that au pair programs by agencies are presented to au pairs in a way that emphasizes cultural exchange, while for host families, the programs "promise flexible and obedient domestic workers" (Bikova, 2008: 70). This assertion holds true for Host Mother Mary, whom I will introduce next, but it does not align with my final case study in this chapter involving host mother Sinead.

Before delving into the case studies below, it's crucial to highlight that confusion and ambiguity are among the outcomes of these imaginations. It's not solely about varying expectations; there's also a shortfall in providing comprehensive information to au pairs and host families, especially on widely used platforms such as AuPair World where information is gathered.

Host Family Expectations: Live-in help at an affordable cost?

Mary

Before COVID-19 emerged in Ireland on January 24th, 2019, I travelled to an urban town in the east of Ireland, to do ethnographic fieldwork at Mary's home. I had called Mary several times before she consented to let me inside her home. She didn't want an inquisitive anthropological researcher wandering about her house at first. But, after a while, I earned her trust, and she welcomed me into her house "with open arms" (an idiom that I no longer use because of COVID-19). She lives in a housing estate a short walk from the town centre and a 15-minute walk from a shopping mall, where I met several au pairs socialising and having a coffee together on their free time. Mary is in her late thirties and has three children; two boys aged five and nine and a daughter, aged 18 months. Her husband works shifts (she declined to provide his job description for unexplained reasons), and she works for a telecommunications company in Dublin and takes every Friday off to spend time with her children; as a result, she was at home when I arrived at 10 a.m. on Friday. This was also her au pair's day off, and she had gone before I arrived to meet her au pair friends in the shopping mall. Her two sons were in school at the time, and her 18-month-old had just awoken from a nap. I arrived at feeding time, and she asked me to watch her baby while she prepared her food. Mary

noted that she was extremely stressed and struggled to do mundane tasks whilst looking after a baby.

Mary lives in a 4-bedroom house, all the bedrooms are upstairs, the living room and kitchen are downstairs. The living room and kitchen are separated by double doors. I was watching the baby while Mary was in the kitchen and the double doors were opened. We then talked over a cup of coffee and her baby was content in her mother's arms.

I asked Mary why she got an au pair and what were her expectations. She expressed immediate frustration at the cost of childcare in Ireland.

> I have three children and childcare in a crèche, or centre would cost me more than a 1,000 euro a month, also there are limited spaces for children especially babies, and it is not flexible on time. I cannot afford to leave my job and stay at home so getting an au pair was the best option but if I did not get an au pair, I would have to quit my job. It is a fucking shit-show here.
> (Mary 2020)

Mary informed me that she is worried about the Irish government signing The European Agreement on au pair Placement because "it might enforce minimum wage for au pairs as compulsory, and I could not afford to pay my au pair minimum wage. I hope the Irish government does not sign it." This comment shows that she is perplexed by the present status of au pairs and the rules that govern them. Mary pays her au pair €100 per week including food and housing. For Mary, this is not a cultural exchange program; it is a full-time job, and she expects her au pairs to respect her as an employer. Mary informed me that her au pair had three days off each week but did not specify how many hours they work. She has written a contract and guidelines for her au pairs to sign, but she cannot afford to pay them minimum wage. Mary did not always have this viewpoint. When she got her first au pair, she followed the host

family guidelines that she found on AuPair World and did not have a formal contract. She stated that she felt "expected to treat them like a member of the family but I never wanted to just feel expected to."

Mary recruits her au pairs on AuPair World, "some of the girls on AuPair World look like sex workers and I steer clear of them, I narrow down potential au pairs based on their profile picture, level of English, age and telephone conversation." Mary told me she prefers younger au pairs because "it is easier to give them rules and instructions rather than someone of similar age to me and I prefer European au pairs because of the visa purposes as Brazilian au pairs need to go to a language school for 3-4 hours a day and this clashes with my work schedule".

Before Mary 'hired' her first au pair she had done her research on what is expected of host families in Ireland. She tried to understand the government guidelines and guidelines on AuPair World, but Mary did not understand if she needed to pay her au pairs minimum wage. For host families it is not clear what is expected of them. Having an au pair for Mary is about affordable and flexible childcare that suits her schedule. The imagined au pair for Mary was a cheaper childcare alternative. She did not have high expectation of a Mary Poppins inspired woman coming to her rescue. She had opted on an au pair since it was the most convenient or 'only' method for her to match the demands of her paid work outside the home with the coordination of childcare and household maintenance chores.

Sinead

In contrast to Mary's case study, Sinead's expectations were considerably higher. She wanted one-to-one care for her children at home, and she wanted her au pair to be their

best friend. She wanted her children to receive more attention than they would at a crèche, Montessori, play school etc. Sinead claimed that it would have been more affordable for her to enrol her children into a crèche, but she wanted someone to "love" her children and play with them in the comfort of their own home. She paid her au pair one hundred euro a week plus board and lodging for approximately 25 hours of work, she did not want her au pair to clean the house, because Sinead had also hired a cleaner.

> It was not about money at all or the cost of childcare in Ireland, it would have actually been cheaper for me to have gone to a crèche because I am just gone for a couple of hours and my ex-husband could have brought the kids to school and I finished work at one o'clock. So, it would have been actually cheaper for me to have got somebody you know within Ireland, but I just kind of wanted… I had this romantic idea that my kids were going to have a friend. My friends who have gotten au pairs it has been because they cannot afford childminders.

(Sinead 2020)

Sinead, in her mid-forties, has been living in a rented apartment in an east-central town in Ireland for the past seven years with her two children: sixteen-year-old Daniel and twelve-year-old Grace. Sinead had one au pair nine years ago when Daniel was seven and Grace was three years old. Sinead also had her own au pairing experience when she was 17 years old with three different households in France and Geneva. Sinead explained that she wanted to be at home for the first three years of her children's lives because she believed that a mother should do this for the development of a child, but she experienced depression, and this caused arguments with her husband. Her husband at the time (now ex-husband) was working full-time, and he told her that her mind was not active and that she needed to go back to work because she "was finding problems where there are none, go back to work, and maybe we can salvage this relationship." Sinead works in the beauty industry and went back to work as a full-time manager for

a salon. The pressures of trying to be "a great mom" were too much for Sinead. She wanted a clean house every day and wanted to make sure it looked perfect but that was not sustainable for her mental health. Sinead wanted a young au pair because she said she would question the au pair's motives if they were above the age of twenty-five. She thought if they are above a certain age, they might be using au pairing as a form of escapism. Ideally Sinead wanted an au pair with care experience "even with siblings or family member because my au pair [Sinead's first au pair] ignored the needs of my children." She wanted her au pair to be her children's best friend she wanted them to be loved by this idealised young au pair.

For Sinead she wanted her au pair "to have the time of her life" and this quote reflects the vocabulary used on au pair agency websites. Sinead understood the importance of cultural exchange for her au pair because she was an au pair in the past. However, the exchange was between the au pair and her children and did not directly involve Sinead. Sinead was expecting someone to love her children, and this can be connected to Hochschild's (2003) persuasive essay entitled "Love and Gold". Hochschild argues that the care and love provided by third world women is a resource that is like "the nineteenth- century extraction of gold, ivory, and rubber from the third world" (Hochschild 2003: 26). She claims that under today's form of imperialist extraction, love and caring are "the new gold" since emotional labour is extracted at a low cost from poorer parts of the world to benefit richer ones. She argues "a nanny's love of her child is a natural product of her more loving third world culture, with its warm family ties, strong community life, and long tradition of patient maternal love of children" (Hochschild, 2003:23). If love is a precious resource, it is impossible to simply extract it from third world countries and implant it into the first world. Hochschild (2003; 2012) applies Marx's theory of fetishization of things to support

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her argument. According to Marx (1997), we see an item independently of its surroundings and without consideration for how it was formed. We unknowingly remove the love between au pair and child from the global capitalist order of love to which it very much belongs, just as we mentally isolate our conceptions of an item from the human context within which it is manufactured. However, as I outlined above, au pairs in Ireland are from middle to upper class European homes and often with university educations. Therefore, I'm not claiming that the host families in this study are components of the 'global care chain,' (see above) in which women from the global south are extracted and placed in the homes of affluent women; rather, my argument is that some host families in Ireland want or imagine an au pair who will love their children despite being paid in 'pocket money.' This expectation can be reinforced by agencies that shape and develop the image of au pairs and host families.

For the majority of my au pair participants, expectations of au pairing were connected with the concept of cultural exchange. In particular to be immersed into an Irish family that helps them improve their communication English skills. The ability to learn or practice a language is possibly the most structured method in which au pairs are expected, or envisioned, to participate in cultural exchange. For some host families their expectations of incorporating an au pair into their family did not revolve around cultural exchange, in fact, for some the idea of cultural exchange was a burden. In common with findings from Cox and Busch (2018) host families were aware that cultural exchange was an essential element for the au pair experience, but they needed an au pair to meet their childcare, personal and domestic needs, rather than engage in a mutual exchange. So cultural exchange is primarily for the au pair to learn about the host's culture and not the other way around. Previous research on au pairing has emphasized the host's unwillingness to participate in or foster cultural exchange.

Cultural exchange might feel like too much challenging work for hosts, especially those who have experienced 'au pair fatigue' after their first few au pairs (Buriková and Miller 2010). As Durin (2015) discovered in her research in Marseille, host families may choose au pairs that are culturally similar. Au pairs who seek to share their culture might even be rejected by host families, as Stubberud (2015) discovered: one of her au pair interviewees was fired for attempting to impart her culture to the children she cared for. Amongst my participants, hosts were aware of the notion of cultural exchange and understood that it was important for their au pairs, however, most host families felt that the au pair should take it upon themselves to get a cultural exchange or in Sinead's case the exchange is between the au pair and her children. Therefore, the imagined expectations of au pairs and host families are not fixed but rather situated.

Conclusion:

While au pair agencies such as AuPair World and AuPair.com construct and shape images and form expectations for both au pair and hosts, the regulation and actual practices in Ireland are complex and contested. The government has established two conflicting sets of expectations. On one hand, individuals must be over eighteen but under the age of 28 to participate in a cultural exchange program. On the other hand, the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) insists that these individuals are employees entitled to receive at least the minimum wage. Interestingly, the same documents also suggest that these participants are considered part of the family and receive pocket money. Because these factors, namely pocket money and being part of

a family, are not consistent with adult wage workers, limiting their compensation to pocket money may infantilize the au pair[40].

This chapter has examined the different expectations for au pairs and host families. For host families, au pairing can be seen as an economic solution for the squeezed middle class. They imagine the au pair as an uncomplicated answer to their childcare and household needs. Some mothers rely on the au pair as a more affordable and flexible alternative to a crèche while others anticipate the au pair will provide the love of an additional family member. Simultaneously au pairing is advertised as cultural exchange which is attractive to young women from middle- and upper-class backgrounds. This allows it to be underpaid as a 'rite of passage' for young women rather than more official paid employment that domestic workers rely on.

How au pair and host families imagine their imagined experience is 'situated' because their expectations are context-dependent and can vary based on the specific circumstances or situation. They are flexible and can be influenced by several factors, as I noted above. As Appadurai (1996: 31), argues that "the image, the imagined, the imaginary" are

> No longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is elsewhere), no longer simple escape (from a world defined principally by more concrete purposes and structures), no longer elite pastime (thus not relevant to the lives of ordinary people), and no longer mere contemplation (irrelevant for new forms of desire and subjectivity), the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility.

(ibid: 31)

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[40] This can have impact on the au pairs lifestyle. With limited earnings their expectations are not met.

Therefore, au pairs and host families 'imagined worlds' is no longer just a daydream or a form of escapism of an imagined better life and or experience. Imagination can be viewed as a way for people to navigate and negotiate possibilities within the broader global context. Imagination can play a role in shaping desires and how we see ourselves in the world. Imagined expectation can influence how au pair and host families shape reality of their time together. Consequently, this influences the establishment of boundaries between the au pair and the host family. Chapter Four will assess how the host family set boundaries at the beginning of the au pair's stay and will explore how the lived reality might diverge from the imagined experience. I will examine their experiences and the daily grind of care work as it challenges their imagined experience set up by film, media, and websites but also influences how boundary work is initially constructed.

Chapter Four: First Contact Host Families

So, when they [the au pair] arrived, I had to get their room ready and cleaned, and they had their own ensuite. I would collect them at the airport and bring them back to my house so they can look around and get settled into their bedroom. I needed an au pair that could drive so I would bring them to the supermarket and ask them to drive so they could get use to the opposite side of the road with me, and I wanted them to pick foods that they like so I would know what to buy for them. It was a big learning curve for them, and the supermarket is not too far away, it is about 10 kilometres and that is where the Spanish school is so they would normally take the lessons there. So, I would bring them around and like I would always take a few days off. And, you know, show them around and show them the routine to know beforehand, especially on our first au pair because we had no idea. I am a big list person so I would type everything out. Like what needs to be done on this day and that day. And their duty was to bring the kids to school, then to tidy the kitchen, and wash the kitchen floor, hanging out a load of washing, and then they were kind of free. Then they would have to do a school collection of 1.40pm, and another one at 2.40pm. So, the night before myself [host mother] and Martin [host father] would cook dinner for the following day, because I found that none of them [au pairs] really could cook.

[Sara, host mother, 2020]

Introduction

Sara's vignette demonstrates the early preparations and boundary work a host mother may invest in to integrate an au pair into the family while still segmenting home and work. Sara, a host mother in her forties, is from a town in east-central Ireland. Sara's family consists of four members: herself, her husband, and two boys, aged eight and four. Sara returned to work and sent her children to a childminder, but they did not like leaving their house every morning. She also felt a childminder did not spend enough time with her children, so she decided to hire an au pair through AuPair World. As she had a preference for someone with childcare expertise, her first au pair was a twenty-four-year-old primary school teacher from Spain. Sara sets precise boundaries from the outset, leaving little possibility for misinterpretation. She prominently displays the au pair schedule on her refrigerator so that it is visible and a constant reminder for her au pair. She takes a few days off work to allow her au pair to shadow

her and adjust to her household rhythms and routines. Sara establishes structure and boundaries as soon as she makes 'first contact' with an au pair. In this chapter, the primary focus will be on the perspectives of host families (primarily host mothers) as they establish boundaries upon the arrival of their au pair. Chapter Five will then delve into the viewpoints and experiences of au pairs.

Host families play a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics of both employment and family relationships. To guide the analysis, I employ the concept of boundary work, which helps explain how these boundaries take shape within the household during the initial interactions with the au pair. It is important to make a clear distinction between boundary work and strict rules. The emphasis here lies in understanding boundaries rather than rigid rules because it allows a more nuanced exploration of the intricate ways in which these practices intersect with the dynamics of relationships within the household. However, it is important to acknowledge that the concept of boundary work is not without its complexities. The concept of boundary work is particularly useful as a starting point in my analyses, however much cultural sociology research as mentioned below neglects to fully explore the fluidity of social and symbolic boundaries. By comparison and to support the viewpoint that boundaries are inherently fluid and constantly changing, I draw inspiration from anthropologist Bob Simpson's (1994; 1997; 1998) research, particularly his work on negotiating boundaries within homes where divorced couples navigate the intricate process of constructing and maintaining overlapping and, at times, conflicting social networks, boundaries, and identities.[41] Additionally Wallman's (1978) research provides useful insights addressing the fluidity of social boundaries.

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[41] Chapter Seven provides a more comprehensive exploration of anthropological literature pertaining to the concept of boundaries.

As detailed in earlier chapters, au pairs in Ireland are formally classified as domestic workers and are entitled to the minimum wage. However, au pairs and host families alike do not use the phrase domestic workers; instead, they adhere to the 'traditional'[42] concept of au pairing as a form of cultural exchange. Despite this, I've discovered some host families use boundaries in their homes to align employee-employer connections more tightly, while other host families seek to remove barriers to create a family-like atmosphere for the au pair. Host families may have the advantage in determining whether to integrate or separate au pairs from the family, as well as whether to stress or reduce hierarchical disparities between themselves and the au pair. This is not an either/or issue that must be noted. It is a spectrum that fluctuates depending on what and with whom it is being discussed. Further, host families' practices may change as they become more experienced hosts. And finally, au pairs and host families may also hold diverse viewpoints, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Three looked at the pre-contact period, when various forces, such as au pair agencies, affect au pairs' and host families' expectations and imagined roles. It also looked the au pair selection and hiring process, while emphasizing that this is the responsibility of the host family parents (usually the mother). This chapter will go a step further and investigate the 'first contact' between host families and au pairs. I use the term 'first contact' to refer to the interview stage, the preparation of the house when host families employ an au pair, the beginning of the au pair's stay, the establishment of the contract, and/or the setting of the first boundaries.

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[42] More information on what constitutes a 'traditional au pair' may be found in chapters 1 and 3.

To investigate the micro-politics of employing au pairs, I employ the concept of "boundary work", a concept that has gained prominence in contemporary cultural sociology research (Nippert-Eng 1995; Lamont 1992; Lamont and Molnar's 2002), as well as the examination of social and symbolic boundaries within the field of anthropology (Barth, 1969; Wallman, 1978). I utilize the term 'boundary work' as a theoretical framework to examine how host families and au pairs navigate social boundaries within the household. The initial negotiation of these boundaries holds particular significance, especially at the onset of their relationship. In the following chapters, I will demonstrate how relationships between au pairs and host families develop and what occurs when boundaries are breached. However, in this chapter, I also adapt the concept of 'intensive mothering by proxy' coined by MacDonald (2010:91) to analyse controlling mechanisms applied by host mothers. This chapter delves into the dynamics of how host families 'do' boundary work and enact intensive mothering by proxy. The subsequent chapter will focus on how au pairs 'do' boundary work and how it can be connected to emotional labour.

Theoretical Framework: Social boundaries and Boundary Work

Anthropologist Fredrik Barth (1969) delves into the examination of social and symbolic boundaries by analysing interactions within various ethnic groups. He contends that ethnic groups are outcomes of social construction and are not fixed entities; instead, they are composed of individuals who actively adjust their cultural identities in response to the circumstances they face. According to Barth, the presence of a boundary is the key factor that sets ethnic groups apart. The boundary plays a crucial role for these groups in establishing their distinctiveness.[43] Building upon

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[43] See Chapter Seven for further analyses on boundaries in Anthropology.

Barth's research, Sandra Wallman (1978: 205) contends that, "A social boundary is symbolic, although it may of course be symbolised by real things. Being symbolic, it is also situational, responding to changes in the relationship between the internal and the external system." Wallman acknowledges that influences and items may traverse a social boundary without necessarily jeopardizing it. While her primary focus lies in unveiling processes related to 'race' and ethnicity in England, she identifies several promising avenues for studying social boundaries more generally. Wallman contends that social boundaries exhibit ongoing changes, yet specific junctures within any boundary process can be pinpointed. Wallman categorizes these junctures as "boundary marking," "boundary shift," and "boundary dissonance."

It is important to note that these processes do not follow a strict chronological sequence. While Wallman examines three categories of boundary processes, I will focus in particular on 'boundary marking'. Wallman (1978: 210-213) states that boundary marking is a social boundary that arises when distinctions "between categories of people" and "systems of organization" are used for various reasons, defining itself in relation to the 'other' or 'us' versus 'them'. "Both its position and its significance are fluid. They vary with the need to differentiate, and according to the availability and appeal of other criteria of difference". The importance of the boundary may differ on one side compared to the other, having more consistent or different significance. Boundary shift is a social boundary responsive to the dynamics between the 'sides,' dividing the 'inside' and 'outside' of a system. In situations of power asymmetry, one side might exert dominance through exclusion or encapsulation. Conversely, the weaker side may establish a boundary to protect itself from intrusion or homogenization from the 'other' side. Boundary dissonance refers to how well a social boundary is consistent and effective, which depends on its alignment with other

boundaries. A close fit happens when lines of difference coincide or when they are symbolically linked, creating the perception that they occur simultaneously (ibid: 210-213).

Wallman's framework of boundary processes is applicable when considering how boundaries are established during the initial interaction between au pairs and host families. Furthermore, it is crucial to understand that boundary marking like boundary work typically does not result from deliberate actions by host families and au pairs. Instead, it often emerges as a response to changes in the broader unspoken understanding, impacting how both parties perceive and interact with each other. This underscores the dynamic and evolving nature of the relationship between au pairs and host families, influenced by individual preferences, cultural backgrounds, and evolving household dynamics. The concept of 'boundary marking' comes into play, as some host families may seek to define clear boundaries and rules right from the beginning, aiming to emphasize the distinction between "us" (the hosts) and "them" (the au pairs). Conversely, some host families may take a more lenient approach, attempting to foster a relaxed atmosphere, akin to being a "cool mom" or creating an environment with minimal boundaries and rules. It is essential to recognize that these boundaries are not fixed but exist on a fluid continuum. Different host families may lean toward one or more approaches to boundary work in response to changing circumstances and shifting dynamics within the household. The significance of boundary shift becomes apparent when examining the power dynamics between the host family and the au pair. In most cases, the host family maintains a position of power in setting social boundaries. Au pairs possess some agency in setting boundaries and can establish their own parameters within the household to shape an environment that aligns more closely with their preferences (see Chapter Five). When

inconsistencies arise in these social boundaries, causing them not to align seamlessly, it may lead to tensions within the home (see Chapter Seven). However, as Wallman notes, within the context of boundary dissonance individuals have the flexibility to adjust their allegiance based on changes in circumstances or context. This can occur as relationships progress, with the development of a kin-like connection evolving gradually through shared activities such as food and living arrangements, as well as the provision of care.

Amrith and Coe (2022) explore this processual development of kinship, contending that migrant care workers use kinship as a framework to assert their sense of belonging and reinforce their social value. The process of 'kinning' can empower them to confront job insecurity, pursue their goals, and secure better prospects for themselves and their biological kin, even though it also deepens their connection to their employers. In this research, host families may initially establish a contractual relationship and/or a relaxed persona based on preconceived expectations of how an au pair will integrate into their household. Nevertheless, the nature of this dynamic remains fluid, even when the host family's intent is to regard the au pair either as a family member or in a more business-oriented manner. Over time, these perceptions may undergo changes, posing challenges to the initial notions of what is considered an appropriate 'fit' for the host family. Chapter Six will delve deeper into this aspect, as this chapter aims to portray the early stages of the relationship and shed light on how host families 'do' boundary work.

In the following section, I will discuss literature that explores the idea of boundary work, particularly in the context of domestic work. As previously noted, it is important to keep in mind that boundaries are not static; instead, they are fluid and open to contest and negotiation. My goal is to investigate how the implementation of boundary

work contributes to my comprehension of its role in the interactions between au pairs and host families as they strive to coexist within a household.

The Concept and Application of Boundary Work in Domestic Settings

The concept of boundary work has become prominent in cultural sociological research, with Gieryn (1983) introducing the term boundary work to examine how scientists use language to distinguish their work from non-scientific endeavours. Building on Gieryn's concept of boundary work, Lamont (1992:11) contends that boundary work is an "intrinsic part of the process of constituting the self," suggesting that self-definition involves recognizing similarities and differences from others. Lamont's exploration of boundary work emphasizes the significance of symbolic boundaries within upper-middle-class societies in the United States and France.[44] According to Lamont and Molnar (2002), boundaries are vital to social life, and studying boundary work helps comprehend how individuals and organizations navigate these boundaries. Boundary work involves a purposeful individual and collective effort to influence social, symbolic, material, or temporal boundaries, demarcations, and distinctions that impact groups, occupations, and organizations (Lamont & Molnar 2002; Phillips & Lawrence 2012). It is not a passive process; it requires active decision making to determine how people will navigate these complex situations and which aspects of their identity or cultural background they will emphasize or prioritize. (Samaluk 2014: 380; Bakewell 2010: 1694; Bryceson & Vuorela 2002: 11-12; Tkach 2016: 226).

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[44] In additional studies, Lamont (2000) employs this concept to depict the class identification of black and white working-class men, demonstrating their creation of moral boundaries between "people like us" and the 'other'.

However, there has been limited research on the application of boundary work as a theoretical framework for hosting an au pair. However, the concept of boundary work has been discussed in literature on domestic work. Lan (2003) uses the concept of boundary work as a conceptual tool to analyse how Taiwanese employers and Filipina domestic workers manage two overlapping sets of social boundaries. The first set is composed of socio-categorical boundaries along class and ethnicity/nationality lines. Lan investigates the strategic planning of negotiating and maintaining social inequalities. The second set investigates the socio-spatial boundaries that define the realms of privacy and the domestic sphere (Lan 2003). Similarly, Barua, Waldrop, and Haukanes (2017) present a critical examination of the discourses that define the boundary work that women employers in Mumbai and Chennai use in their interactions with their domestic workers. They demonstrate how these discourses differ based on two critical factors: employers' specific positioning features and identification categories in terms of age, occupation, and family background, as well as whether they recruit full-time or part-time workers. Within their interactions with domestic employees, younger, professional employers prefer to use contractual and market-oriented terminology, suggesting that their work relationship should be approached more transactionally. On the other hand, older, non-professional employers with more income and full-time staff frequently rely on maternal narratives, indicating that their interactions with domestic workers seem more loving and kinship based. Barua et al. (2017) state that employers utilize "benevolent maternalism" and a "market-based approach" to organize their relationships with domestic employees. Benevolent maternalism is a tradition in which women who hire other women use the particularly feminine characteristics of "motherliness and protectiveness" to exert control and influence over their employees (Rollins 1985: 179-186). According to

Barua et al. (2017: 12), "instrumental personalism" is a market-based strategy that is based on a more contractual and business-like interaction.

The combination of home and work is particularly apparent with the inclusion of an au pair into the household since preliminary integration and boundary work is conducted. Attempting to solve "the jigsaw puzzle of life" (Elden and Anving 2019: 37), in which families attempt to balance home and work, and the addition of an au pair, nanny, domestic worker, or childminder may help to overcome these challenges. Hochschild (1997:2) attempts to answer similar questions in the book 'The Time Bond,' She asks, "what was the right balance between work and home? Between having no responsibility and full responsibility for the care of others? Between providing direct care or paying others to do your caring work for you?" Hochschild (1997:2) states that "amid the many pressures of daily life, most working parents were trying to answer the balance question by the seat of their pants." Hochschild (1997) didn't employ the term "boundary work," but she did recognize the interconnected, yet conflicting emotional challenges and tensions individuals encounter while attempting to juggle their work and family responsibilities. She saw these challenges as not distinct sets of tasks but rather as entangled aspects of individuals' lives.

Nippert-Eng (1995) states that 'work' and 'home' can be fully "integrated," there is no distinction between what belongs to each realm and when and where it belongs to each. In this perspective, elements associated with both domains are seen as unified, regardless of location or social roles. Nippert-Eng observes employees at a research laboratory in the Northeastern United States as either "extreme integrators" or "extreme segmentors," with extreme integrators displaying a consistent mindset and persona across all aspects of life. While acknowledging a spectrum between these extremes, she emphasizes that extreme integrators view all time and space as

multipurpose. In contrast to her argument, I do not align myself with the notion of absolute extremes in the context of hosting an au pair. Even if a host family member perceives themselves as positioned at one end of the integrator-segmentor spectrum, their actions and established social boundaries often lead to more nuanced and complex outcomes. In this research, host families frequently exhibit changing approaches rather than adhering strictly to one extreme.

Therefore, very little is static when dealing with boundaries in the home. Anthropologist Bob Simpson (1997) adapts a Maussian view of exchange to conduct ethnographic research among divorcing men and women in Britain on gift versus commodities in the home. He points out that work at home is usually thought of as giving without reckoning (for our loved ones) but at certain junctures rationalised monetary calculation comes into play, such as when a marriage breaks down and the father wants to give money as gifts to his children whereas the mother wants money in her bank account. He states

> It is assumed that within the nuclear family household of Western tradition, husbands, wives, and children are generally keen to avoid placing monetary values on the services and gifts they daily transact even though these do have a monetary value in the marketplace. Similarly, there is a reluctance to place strict time limits on the reciprocation of these transactions. To engage in the unseemly activity of putting monetary values and time limits on the obligations and sentiments of kinship would be perceived as distinctly odd.
>
> (Simpson 1997:1).

The barrier between homes and markets, on the other hand, is significantly more porous. Au pairs should not be regarded as employees since this would imply a problematic social distance, yet they likewise shouldn't be considered as family members who may not be fully compensated for their service.

Host families that desire an additional family member - or at least this is what they believe they should want - or my participants who are single mothers who want a "friend" or "another adult in the house for company" state they intend on integrating their au pairs into their family life. It is worth noting the observation that first-time host families in particular, may feel an obligation to integrate the au pair into their family (expectations are covered in Chapter Three), and (see Chapter Seven for experienced host families). As previously mentioned, each family and their home are on a spectrum of approaches; they may lean towards one or several and in some cases lean towards one more prominently. Host families who claim they want to "fully integrate" the au pair into the family and blur the boundaries between 'work' and 'home' often aim to create an inclusive and closely-knit household at the beginning of their relationship. For my participants, this may involve a relaxed attitude regarding home spatial boundaries; disregarding or failing to create a contract of employment; and/or blurring boundaries between employer and employee instead using family and/or friends' terminology. In this study, host families who claim to choose a more formalized or contractual connection reside along the segmentation spectrum. It is important to consider the range of integrating and segmenting mechanism, perceptions and connections between work and home since it suggests that these categories and their boundaries must be negotiated. Determining how much a host family will segment or integrate their au pair into their home requires setting boundaries.

In the remaining sections of this chapter, I will look at the concept of boundary work as it applies to au pairs and host families from the perspective of the host family. Through the lens of two case studies, I will focus specifically on the circumstances surrounding boundary work in host families' homes, where initial boundary work happens to assess if the family intends on integrating the au pair as a member of

the family or maintain a more separated, business-like relationship. It should be noted that these boundaries may shift, evolve, or even disappear over time. The goal of this chapter is to establish host families' first expectations and views of what boundaries they feel they desire at the start of their relationship with an au pair and how boundaries are established.

Aoife: "I needed a friend not an employee"

Aoife is a single mom in her mid- forties and works part time in education. She is from a small agricultural town in the Northeast of Ireland, approximately one hour and thirty minutes from Dublin by public transport. Aoife expressed that she "needed" an au pair because she was suffering from depression, and she had just separated from her husband. Aoife expressed that having an au pair was not just for childcare purposes but also for company. "I was happy to live with a woman. ha-ha. To be honest, dopey man. But anyway, and she was a little bit older than me she was 42 and I was 39 at the time. And we just got on really nicely. I liked living in this sort of female household."

It was in the summer of 2018 when Aoife's husband moved out. She was attempting to balance her role as a single parent of three children, two daughters, ages 6 and 4, and one son, age 2, as well as her part-time lecturing job. Despite having a childminder, she was conscious that she needed additional assistance and another adult in the house for company. She spotted an advertisement on Facebook posted by a friend of a friend about a woman named Daniela who was travelling to Ireland from Brazil and looking for work. Daniela was in her early forties and wanted to improve her English for her career back in Brazil. Daniela was already in Dublin, so Aoife chose to meet her face to face for the first time with her children. She drove to Dublin, picked her up, and took her to her home in County Meath. She was not sure whether

she wanted an au pair, but she felt it would be great to meet her in person to see if she and the children connected. Aoife stated "I was not entirely sure if I wanted to take her on board because I am still trying to figure out did, I need an au pair? I guess, you know, I was just all over the place."

Aoife showed Daniela around her home and introduced her to her children and parents. She informed Daniela that she needed some help with childcare and light domestic tasks. Aoife did not mind that Daniela was older than her; in fact, she preferred having a woman similar to her age for companionship. The initial visit went well Aoife commented:

> She was so lovely. Her English was fairly limited. But I was able to communicate fairly well, and I was used to speaking to people with English as a second language. I used to teach English as second language as well. So that was kind of helpful. So, I brought her to the house, and I introduced her to my children. She met my parents too. I showed her around, I told her what I was looking for. You know, she had coffee. And it was super nice.

Aoife told Daniela that she was willing to pay her 170 euro per week (including 50 euro for bus expenses) because she was aware that au pairs are were paid roughly 100 euro per week and she did not want to exploit Daniela. Daniela told Aoife that she needed to be in Dublin every day for English classes as it was a requirement for her student visa. This did not really suit Aoife's schedule as she needed childcare in the morning and afternoon. That evening after Aoife brought Daniela home, she began to do some more research on AuPair World (see Chapter Three) and found a handbook for host families which helped her formulate a contract and set initial boundaries (see below). "I use that as a guideline because there be things you would not think about or talk to someone about if you have never had an au pair, so I found that really useful. So, there is a kind of a handbook about how to communicate the kind of boundaries or rules or whatever."

Since their schedules conflicted, Aoife was apprehensive about employing Daniela,

but she later explained:

> I met her and everything and I said I will just get back to you. I will just confirm because I still was not sure. And then basically between then about a week, I had this huge crisis essentially like I kind of had a nervous breakdown. Where I was just Yeah, I was exhausted. There were issues with my ex-husband he was flipping out. And I said, Do you know what, I am going to go with this. I am going to ring up Daniela and say, if you want to start tomorrow, you can. And I did. And so, I went and collected her, and she came and so we had already had that meeting, the first time at my house. I told her about the bus and everything.

Aoife stated that she initially wanted Daniela as a friend rather than an employee, and

she wanted to integrate Daniela into her family unit. Nevertheless, she created a

contract for her au pair to establish initial boundaries. Aoife recalls:

> I actually wrote up a kind of a contract. It was not legally binding, but it was something that we both read and agreed to. And she printed it for herself actually, I do not think we signed it. I just gave it to her. And she kept it in her drawer, and I put lots of contact information for doctors and family members. And all of that. And in the end, most of it was never needed. Do you know what I mean? We had an excellent relationship in that regard. There were no issues. There were no problems generally. You know, so yeah, no, it was it was I was fairly kind of, you know, I planned it in advance as much as I could. And I know from other type of interactions that it is very good to have the discussions about what can or should not be done and what is expected what's not expected. And I was just very keen, I did not want to exploit her anything and I wasn't always comfortable with the whole I am getting better at but just asking people to do stuff like can you help with us? Can you do that? So, yes, that is how that is how it started. I have had a lot of people work with me in our old home in San Diego, where my husband is from, we had a maid, and he always said like, it is a very different culture like you just tell people what to do and they just do it. I could not do that like, I can do it in a different work scenario or if it is a work thing but not at home. I find it really hard, and I think it is very, very, maybe an Irish thing where you are like, oh, would you mind or is that okay?

Aoife struggled with hierarchical distinctions, especially at home. She was conscious,

though, that Daniela needed to know how she operates her household, and that

preliminary boundaries needed to be established. Aoife provided Daniela a contract of

employment, which is excerpted below. It should be emphasized that neither party signed this document nor followed it exactly. It served as a list of guidelines for Aoife's au pair.

Weekly Hours
We require help with the children and housework.   Core hours on Monday to Friday, are 8 am to 11am and 7.30pm to 9.30pm (with occasional additional babysitting as required); Saturdays 10am to 5pm, occasional babysitting in evening. Sunday evenings to help put children to bed. There should be some flexibility on both sides, and the schedule will be agreed in advance each week
Total hours of work per week will not exceed 35 hours.
Childcare duties include feeding children, playing with them/supervising their play, reading to them, taking them for walks to the park, dressing them, putting them to bed, babysitting while they are asleep.
Light housework tasks include:
Washing dishes, including loading, and unloading dishwasher
Preparing simple meals for children
Keeping kitchen tidy and clean, including sweeping, and mopping floors
Loading and unloading laundry into washing machine and dryer
Putting washed clothes away
Ironing for children
Vacuuming
Dusting
Making and changing children's beds
Cleaning children's bathroom
Everything to do with keeping their own room/bathroom clean and tidy
Light shopping (not the entire household shopping)
Walking and feeding pets
Emptying bins
Weekly Chores

Please keep the general living space clean (kitchen, TV room, hallway), cleaning up after meals. Vacuuming and mopping the floors, cleaning counter and tabletops. Please keep the children's room clean and change bedclothes if necessary (at least once a week). Wash, dry, iron and put away children's clothes. Please keep your room clean.
__Visitors__
Please check with Aoife first before inviting anyone back to the house.
__Reporting Procedure__
A copy book will be provided to record children's routine on a daily basis. This will include the following details; Breakfast, Lunch, Snacks, Sleep, Nappies, Activity etc.
__Pay__
Pay is 170 euro per week (including 50 euro to cover Leap Card); paid every Saturday morning.
Accommodation (private room) and food is provided.
__Review Period__
Daniela will begin on Saturday 23 July 2018. We will review after two (2) weeks (on Saturday 6 July), to determine if both parties are happy with the arrangement. I encourage open communication on all issues at all times

Figure 9: Aoife's contract of employment

The contract above states that the au pair should be available and ready to work each morning from 8am to 11am, however, Daniela had to go to Dublin each morning for English lessons and Aoife had to continue paying her previous childminder to help with her childcare needs in the morning and afternoon. However, Daniela was back every evening to assist with bedtime duties and was "a shoulder to cry on" for Aoife. At the start of their relationship, they engaged in this negotiation that Daniela would not be available in the mornings and afternoon. However, as shown below, Daniela did not provide Aoife with the essential childcare needs, but she nonetheless became Aoife's confidant and source of emotional support.

> To be honest, she was gone most of the day. I was not working at the time, so it was fine but when I was teaching, I still had to get Marly the childminder for few hours because it did not work with my teaching. So, it was it was very

expensive, because I was paying Marly 10 euros an hour and then I was paying Daniela 170 euro a week. I do not think I was paying them too much. Especially Marly because she was amazing. She was so great with the kids. She was always doing stuff around the house. She was an extremely experienced older woman and I felt 10 euro was the bare minimum, but it did add up. I was spending a lot of money. So, the Au Pair was not fabulously good value in that sense, given that she did not really meet my sort of basic childcare needs, but she met my emotional needs, and she wasn't paid for that. I suppose that is one thing I would have imagined but I knew that she had to commute to Dublin every day and I suppose that was one of the reasons I had not thought I would go with her straightaway. Because I had this huge crisis. And I could not do this on my own I needed someone, and I had already met her. She seemed lovely. That was very valuable then. I think we had it in the contract that we would have two weeks and if we both agreed that it did not work, we would end it because I did not want to take someone on and then find out it was terrible. So, we had a month kind of grace period. But I did tell her that after that I gave her like a six-month minimum because you cannot just kick someone out. That was the other thing I was so aware of. It is not like a normal job that if you lose your job, you lose your job, but if you lose your job here, you lose your home. When she did actually move out. She actually kind of wanted to leave because she was a bit fed up with commuting.

A more relaxed working relationship usually relies on host families downplaying their hierarchical position and asymmetric power relations. Aoife accomplished this by developing a close friendship connection with her au pair and not discussing spatial boundaries in the home. In truth, Aoife desired Daniela's companionship every evening. Unfortunately, Daniela had returned to Brazil during the time of my interviews with Aoife, so I never got the chance to ask her if she thought it was well received. Despite the fact the Aoife created a contract of employment for her au pair, which one could associate with a business-like relationship between home and work, with clear boundaries established, Aoife wanted to be more elastic in terms of boundaries regarding companionship rather than an employee/worker relationship. Her decision to use a contract, even if it was not implemented or legally enforceable, meant that Aoife's negotiated boundaries were not fixed they were more porous despite seeming static in the contract.

This type of relationship was echoed by Bridget, a different host mother, who wanted to be more prominent on the continuum of integration. Bridget is in her mid-forties and a single mother of two children, she resides in a town in the east of Ireland and works in education. When her ex-husband relocated to another country for work, she decided to hire an au pair. She expected it to be just temporary, but after they separated, "having an au pair became more of a permanent solution." Bridget, unlike Aoife, did not create a contract or show any signs of a contractual relationship. However, like Aoife, she decided to hire her first au pair in order to have extra adult support and company at home. She did not want to create a contract for her au pair because she preferred a more relaxed approach in order for her au pair to feel like a member of the family. Getting an au pair, she explained, was a way for her to "put one foot in front of the other" and to have "another adult in the house for company".

Host families like Aoife and Bridget use a more relaxed approach to try minimizing the social barrier between themselves and the au pair. According to Lan (2003:525) Taiwanese employers of domestic workers do this in order to validate their middle-class identity – "an identity associated with the values of self-reliance, equality, and democracy in a modernized society". Participants in my study, strived to build personal ties with their au pairs in order to assuage their apprehension about having workers dwell in their home, i.e., changing their private haven into a business. Lan (2003:535) refers to this as "personalism." Similar to Lan (2003), employers' desire to develop close relationships with their au pairs is further motivated by their engagement in caregiving. The relationship between employers and employees is one of "instrumental personalism" or "strategic intimacy" in order to offer the best care for their children (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). Even the 'extreme integrator', like Aoife, finds it difficult to separate home and work (Nippert-Eng 1995). Because of this

difficulty we can see an overlap of strategies used by host families to establish and negotiate initial boundaries in the home.

Even though Aoife wanted to pursue a more relaxed approach she also obtained some mechanisms to have some agency over her au pairs work. Macdonald (2010:92) refers to this as "mothering by proxy". "Mothering by proxy" occurs when host families adopt strategic tactics to micromanage their au pairs, which is mostly done by the host mothers in this study and in Macdonald's (2010) research. "Mothering by proxy," like boundary work, falls on a continuum from severe to less intense tactics. Aoife's strategy somewhat fits within the latter category. Macdonald (2010: 91-93) refers to these strategies as "paranormal management," "puppeteer management," and "intensive mothering by proxy," with the latter being the most rigorous. The foundation of paranormal management is the idea that the au pair for host families could and would "naturally" anticipate the mothers' preferences and could and would "naturally" make choices that closely matched those preferences without direction from their employers. Puppeteer management entails developing a set of rules and/or scripting the day for their au pair in order to mould them into the mother-by-proxy that they would be. As illustrated in the opening vignette, Sara took a week off work in order for her au pair to shadow her routines within the household and how she delivered care to her children. Intensive mothering by proxy employs au pairs to provide the care and love they believe they would provide if they were at home with their children. If the mother maintains complete control and power over the au pair, this replacement care becomes a viable option.

Using MacDonald's concepts as guide to analyse the micro-politics at the beginning of an au pairs stay revealed that most families adapt one or more of these tactics to mould the au pair in the family or mould them into an employee. 'Shadowing' was the

most common tactic used by host mothers in this research. This was done mostly in the first week to teach and correct the work that the au pairs were doing. Some host mothers took the week off work to facilitate this. Even for laid back host mothers like Aoife this tactic was used. Aoife stated that for the first week she asked Daniela to watch what she was doing with the children and to copy her methods. This included activities such as bath time, bedtime, and mealtimes. One aspect of Aoife's contract above was the completion of a diary every day, so she could track what activities were played and how the day carried out. In the next case study, I will demonstrate a more business- like relationship that also includes puppeteer management.

Chloe: "When the training is over, they know the flow of our family".

Chloe is in her late thirties and works in recruitment. When she was residing "out in the sticks" in the South of Ireland, she hired her first au pair to look after her daughter, who was six months old at the time. Three years later, she now resides in a town outside Cork with her husband and children. She has had five au pairs so far, with the most recent who left in April 2020 due to the pandemic. Her last au pair was highly active and frequently went out during the Pandemic. Chloe warned her au pair to use caution because her husband suffers from immunodeficiency. She did not want to tell her au pair not to go out or to the gym since she thought this was something an au pair should do, but she did urge her to sanitize and change her clothing before returning to her house. Their au pair said, "if I get the virus, I'm sure I would survive it." Chloe told her au pair that she might survive it, but her husband might not. She wanted the au pair to go but did not want to throw her out, so Chloe advised her au pair to consider leaving because a lockdown was possible and "you might not be able to travel home to your family." After three days her au pair said, "I have decided to go home. Are you ok with that?" "Yes, Absolutely!" said Chloe. This au pair stayed with Chloe's family

for a month, and the following is an example of the varieties of discussions they had at their weekly "check-ins".

Chloe was an au pair in Ireland during the 1990s. She is originally from Austria and fell in love with the country. According to Chloe, Austrians are quite obstinate and complain a lot. She was unhappy when she returned to Austria after her au pair experience and yearned to go back to Ireland.

> I was back in Austria and working in a hotel for one year and one day I remember sitting at home one evening, and a Failte Ireland advertisement came on the TV, and I started crying. I realised I missed Ireland. And that is when I decided to hand in my notice literally the next week. I told my family that I was going back to Ireland, and they were in a bit of a shock but they kind of knew it already, and they said, 'would you not try and get a job first before handing in your notice'? And I handed in my CV everywhere and I found the job. It was the back end of the Celtic Tiger and jobs were advertised everywhere. I found the job within a week, I started a month later, and I had found an apartment, so that was all great. And I remember packing everything I owned into my Volkswagen Golf, that was a tiny car, it was packed to the roof, there was no more space. My friend and I did a road trip to Ireland, we took the ferry and all of that before I kind of joined real life again.

Her own time as an au pair served as inspiration for her experience as a host mother. She structures her approach to au pair management using the model provided by her original host family. Chloe was 18 years old and had just finished high school when she first visited Ireland as an au pair. She needed some time to consider her options because she was unsure of what she wanted to study in college. She learned about taking a gap year as an au pair and registered on the Au Pair World website, but she did not take it too seriously and just went with the flow. She provided Au Pair World with personal information about herself, including her age, background, and preferred location. She initially delayed responding to some of the emails she had received because it was "beginning to feel too real." However, when she did reply, she struck

up a conversation with a family in Cork and they agreed to have an interview over the phone because "there was no skype or zoom back then ha-ha." Later, the host family sent her an email to confirm her job. As Chloe said:

> Back then it was so different. The family had to post a picture of themselves to me, so I could find them at the airport. I was so nervous and a little excited, but I said fuck it ha-ha. I arrived at the airport, and it was a long journey to Cork because there was no motorway at that time. When I arrived at their house, I was introduced to the two boys aged 4 and 5. And they were so cute. It was a brilliant household, and you know, it was not a scummy family they were a good family. They had a small house. My room was a box room, with a single bed, but it was lovely. You did not care you do not think at first, it is for me it was all about the experience. Oh my god I am abroad for the first time on my own.

Chloe often reflected on her experiences as an au pair and wanted her au pairs to have a similar experience to her own, She did not know any people in Ireland or any other au pairs because she registered with an au pair website rather than an agency, but this did not appear to concern Chloe. She characterized herself as an independent, socially awkward person. She obtained English books from the mobile library that visited her host family's home twice a week and read them in her free time. For her sake and "for my host family sanity," her host family encouraged her to interact with people and form relationships outside of the home. She was at first upset by this, but she now realizes why this was crucial.

One day, her host mother presented her with a list of au pair connections that she had obtained via her job. Because she did not feel confident calling total strangers and asking them to hang out, Chloe claimed that this caused her a great deal of anxiety. She spent a week just gazing at the list since, both then and now, "I was really timid and didn't feel brave enough". She was never open with her host family about her anxieties since they were not close enough for that kind of interaction. She went to an internet café one evening to communicate with her family back home when she

overheard a group of German-speaking females discussing a gig. Chloe gathered her strength and exclaimed, "Oh! I am sorry I had to listen to what you were saying, but where is that gig?" She attended the gig feeling like "a proper stalker," but she ran into the same women again at the gig and they happened to be au pairs and on her list of connections. They grew close and a group of six women were formed. Every weekend, they travelled together and did activities like hiking, weekend getaways, and hostel stays.

At six o'clock every night Chloe left her host family's house in order to hang out with her friends. Her host mother dropped the kids off for preschool each morning and then took them to school. After picking them up, Chloe prepared lunch for the two boys and herself before keeping them occupied for the rest of the day. Along with cleaning the house, she played with the boys, went for walks, and engaged in arts and crafts. For the family's dinner to be prepared and ready when they got home from work, she had to make sure it was done. She said:

> I did not know how to cook at that time. A lot of the time it was pizza and chicken nuggets, I do not know how the family did not go pale from the lack of veggies. I do not make my au pairs cook dinner now I do that for them. But as soon as the parents came home, I grabbed my bag, and I was out the door and I met with my friends.

Chloe got paid 200 euro a month "but back then that's equivalent to 400 a month which is pretty good and that's what I pay my au pairs now". Chloe limited the amount of money she spent and only had one glass of alcohol when she went to the pub, she said "it was the life."

For her host family, Chloe was required to keep a diary. She was expected to record in writing every activity she had engaged in with the children, including tracking their meals. Chloe thought she was being micromanaged and that this was a burden. Since the kids could play with "100 toys at once, I was under too much pressure to know

what to write down each day. And it seemed as though they were keeping an eye on me. I do not request a journal from my au pairs because of my experience."

Chloe feels writing a diary for host families is too much pressure. Instead, she has adapted different strategies to set initial boundaries with her au pairs, which we will explore shortly. I questioned Chloe about her feelings of belonging to the family. "I didn't feel like a member of the family since I left the moment they got home, in fact. I did not have a lot of time to spend with my family. Yes, they were kind to me, but I made the decision to have that social outlet, and now it is crucial for my au pairs to have one as well because I want them to feel connected." Chloe does not regard her au pairs as family. She offers her au pairs a choice of staying with them for six or twelve months, but she prefers when they just stay for six months at a time.

> So very often after six months we are like, obviously glad they are leaving, it
> was just a little bit of a breather. Not that they were not nice people, but we
> just needed that. We have lived with somebody and got used to their habits, it
> is time that we have a clean slate you know so it was always good when they
> left.

Timetables Chloe created for her au pairs.

	MORNING	AFTERNOON	Housework
MON	09:-12:00 School	14:00 Swimming	Hover (kitchen, living room, entrance) Laundry
TUE	09:-12:00 School	Walk	Dusting Empty Bins
WED	09:-12:00 School	Playground/Perks (€7)	Hover (all) Laundry
THU	09:-12:00 School	15:30 Library Story Time	Bathroom Water plants Empty Bins
FRI	09:-12:00 School	Bath-Time	Hover (kitchen, living room, entrance) Mop (kitchen, living room, entrance)

Figure 10: General au pair timetable- created by Chloe.

Summer Time Table

	MORNING	AFTERNOON	Housework
MON	Walk -or- Playground	Library	Water Plants Empty Bins
TUE	Busy Bees 09:00-12:00	Activity	Dusting Hover
WED	Swimming	Activity	Kitchen Laundry
THU	Walk -or- Playground	Story Time (Library) 16:00	Hover Bathroom

Figure 11: Summer holiday au pair timetable- created by Chloe.

Aupair Welcome Pack
++AUPAIR NAME++

Figure 12: Au pair welcome pack cover photo- created by Chloe.

Chloe's host mother made a schedule for her that included regular duties like cleaning and playing with the kids. Dusting, laundry, vacuuming, and mopping the floors were among the cleaning chores. She made the decision to make her au pairs a similar schedule (see above). Because her daughter was not in school, she made a special schedule for the summer au pairs that included out-of-the-house activities every morning. Chloe gave the au pair a list of locations where her child was allowed to go as well as a list of things they could do at home. In addition to the schedule, Chloe made the au pair a welcome pack that including advice on health care, transportation, and what to dress in Ireland during the fall and winter, which she referred to as "layering." Additionally, Chloe created a Pinterest board with various crafts and activities to perform with her kids and invited the au pair to visit it. She scheduled "check-ins" with the au pair to assess what is working and what is not at the beginning of the au pair stay for the first two weeks "but after two or three weeks, it generally came to an end since they had truly found their own groove and understood what to

do. We basically only conducted such check-ins when we believed there was a problem." Chloe mostly used these check-ins to address problems with which she was not satisfied. Additionally, Chloe linked the new au pair to a WhatsApp group she had created with other au pairs in her locality. As soon as her new au pair joined the group, she said she departed to give the au pair a chance to mingle and have some solitude. Having a social outlet was important to Chloe since it was important to her throughout her time as an au pair.

According to Chloe, her au pairs must water her plants, wash their own laundry as well as the children's clothes, and clean the bathroom that is shared with their daughter. They are not required to mop the floors but need to vacuum it. Only Chloe and her husband have access to her private bathroom. "The au pair shouldn't need much time to do the cleaning activities; perhaps a half-hour." As she did not want the cleaning to detract from their au pair experience. Chloe reported that:

> Being an au pair should never be about the money it should be about the experience, living with a family, immersing in the language, getting experience with looking after a child and the cultural element - getting to know a country abroad, that in my opinion, is the idea behind being an au pair and, 400 euro a month as an au pair is good. This is not a job where you get paid its pocket money, and I think if the au pair has a car, free food, and a roof over their head what more could they ask for?

Chloe recruited all au pairs and established detailed schedules for them to follow exactly how she conducts mothering so that she could have control over who was caring for her child and how they were caring for her child. Since her husband worked from home, Chloe was relieved to have a standby plan in place. The au pair's hours could also be adjusted based on the fact that "my partner did shift work in the mornings or the afternoons, so a lot of planning and figuring out needed to be done beforehand, which is why I created a timetable for each au pair."

She ideally wanted the au pair to be 19 years old and have a driver's license so that they could receive lower auto insurance. Dwelling in the countryside of Tipperary and Cork, a car was required to transport her daughter to and from school. She also stated that if the au pair desired a social outlet, a car was necessary "for the au pair's sanity, being able to drive in and out of town and meeting other people and socializing." She wanted someone with expertise working with children, but she understood that due to their age, it would not be possible. Surprisingly, the majority of her au pairs had prior childcare or babysitting experience.

Having a young au pair was important for Chloe because she felt that it would be harder to control an older au pair.

Aoife and Chloe discussed the ages of their au pairs at a Zoom focus group event I planned in 2020 for a number of my host family interlocutors amid lockdown constraints, and Chloe was surprised that Aoife hired an older au pair:

> *Researcher:* Chloe is age a factor for you... [before I finished my question she had interrupted]

> *Chloe:* Yes, this is really interesting. When I heard that Aoife's au pair was similar
> age. Ah I do not know how she did that. I find it a lot easier if somebody lives in my
> house that is younger, because it is still my house and I think I can take more like that- Boss role, so hearing that the au pair was the same age, I do not know how I would feel about that. That is the other side and for me where I go, like, mmm I do not know…

> *Aoife:* The fact that Daniela's older than me. I mean honestly, I have to frame all of this on my mental health at the time was really bad, but again this is part of the story obviously this is why I needed an au pair, but I was just recovering from depression I was really tired and stressed. And she was really kind, like I used to be crying a lot and she would be comforting me, and it was not in her job description, but it was great, the kids loved her. I ended up not keeping her because I was paying her a lot, I could not really afford it, but I just I did not want to be exploiting people, and I think it would have been really good value if she had not been studying.

Chloe wanted her au pairs to be mature but also young, and she was careful about the questions she asked them during the interview since she knew that many of them still lived with their parents and did not have the maturity level to care for a baby.

> We were looking for somebody who was not going to just sit there and watch the baby but somebody who really nurtured the development of the child. We made mistakes of getting au pairs who did not do it and they said in the interview that they would but then they were not interacting with the child and that really wrecks my head. We are believers of, there is only a certain amount of screen time, and you know it is about learning through play. We are looking for an interaction and I know it is a lot to ask for but that is what we wanted.

During her time as an au pair, Choe used this experience to influence how she hosted an au pair. To shape the au pair into the parent her child needed when she was not at home, she devised a comprehensive routine and schedule for the au pair to follow. Furthermore, she actively participated in their social lives to ensure they had a similar experience to hers. She tried to established a business- like relationship to ensure some 'segmentation' between home and work and wanted her au pair to understand a clear distinction between both, and for Chloe this was much easier to carry out with younger au pairs. Similar to Macdonald's findings (2010), age was commonly employed as a substitute for trustworthiness at both ends of the spectrum. Although some mothers praised older women's extra-nurturing qualities, others praised the flexibility of younger au pairs. This can be seen in the two case studies above.

The search for Chloe's first au pair was "intense." She had chosen five au pairs based on their Au Pair World profiles and nationality as she wanted the au pair to speak German to her daughter. She interviewed all five candidates and asked them questions such as, "What do you like to do in your spare time? Do you have any experience working with children?" and what would they do in a specific situation with her child? Chloe did not tell me much about the interview process since she said she could not

recall the precise questions and that because she was a good judge of character, it was simple for her to choose. Chloe picked a male au pair as her first because "he really stood out from the rest." He was German, and she stated he had childcare experience. He was 19 years old. Her husband does not usually have an influence on who Chloe chooses, but he was upset about the male au pair because he did not feel comfortable leaving his "little girl with a boy," but Chloe made the ultimate decision and chose the male au pair. She also mentioned that she enjoyed "teaching" him because he did not know what he was doing and had no maternal instincts, but he was pleasant.

> He was lovely but he did not have a clue like, and he was always in such a good mood and everything, and he really tried so hard, and he you could see he loved our daughter. You know he loved the child, and it was lovely to see. And so, a lot of it was a was kind of trying to teach him, what I call the maternal instinct and knowing that when she is crying, you give her a cuddle and to give her the bottle. For him it was very, you know, here is the child what will I do so, yes, a lot of it had to be taught but he was very quick to learn, and he was very good. He stayed for six months we were quite happy with him. And also, he was so funny.

According to Macdonald (2010:97) some host mothers achieved 'paranormal management' by hiring people of the "same ethnic or national origin as themselves; others concentrated on finding caregivers whose values, beliefs, or other important characteristics seemed reassuringly familiar—the same as or remarkably similar to their own. Hiring a person who was "like them," or who reminded them of another well-trusted individual, led these mothers to expect that their caregivers would intuitively know and then automatically carry out their wishes". As previously stated, host families might employ a variety of approaches that do not fall into a single category. This is seen in Chloe's case study because she wants her au pair to have natural instincts to care for her daughter, yet she methodically instructs her au pair on how to 'do' mothering. The well-planned schedules, timetables, and welcome pack suggest a 'puppeteer management' style. Chloe stated that once

the training is over, to have the documents to look back over, so it makes it simpler, and it helps us, not having to repeat the same thing over and over again, or if there is ever an issue, we have to inform them that they didn't do something right that we say. No, it is actually written down, just little things like that to make our lives a little simpler.

Conclusion:

The emphasis of this chapter is on how host families, in particular host mothers, 'do' boundary work with au pairs, particularly at the beginning of their relationship, which I refer to as 'first contact'. To illustrate the fluidity of social boundaries, I examined Wallman's (1978) framework of boundary processes. To comprehend how host families invite an au pair into their home and create social boundaries, I was influenced by Nippert-Eng's (1995) use of the term boundary work and expanded upon it to explore the fluidity of family life. Host families may adopt more than one approach or may lean more strongly towards one. Host families that want their au pair to become a part of the family apply minimal structures and boundaries to accomplish this. The aforementioned case studies show that single mothers Aoife and Bridget desired a friend or a family member and established flexible boundaries right away during their au pair stay. Some host families preferred to have an employee rather than a family member and wanted to segmentate their au pair from home. To accomplish this, a more contractual and business-like relationship was incentivised from the very beginning, and rigid boundaries were applied. These approaches, I argue, exist on a continuum and elements from one can trickle over to the other. This can happen gradually as the relationship grows or it can happen right away at the start of their relationship. According to the case studies above, most host mothers engaged in "mothering by proxy," a practice described by MacDonald (2010). This was typically accomplished by having the au pair shadow them for the first week, creating a detailed

schedule, or trusting that the au pair would "naturally" anticipate the mothers' preferences and be able to and would "naturally" make decisions that closely matched those preferences without direction from their employers.

In Chapter Five, I continue with the notion of boundary work in understanding how do au pairs 'do' boundary work and how do they adjust to settling into their host family's home. I also use Hochschild's (1983) theory of emotional labour to understand how au pairs' initial efforts to be liked by their new hosts acts as an intersectionality of boundary work.

Chapter Five: First Contact: Au Pair

Introduction:

In the summer of 2017, I went to Paris to teach English as a second language. I had trouble finding lodging online since I lacked a French bank account or guarantor and, as a result, had no place to live. When I expressed my concerns to the company I was working for, they first tried to help by sending me website links to student accommodation, but this option was out of my price range, and rental houses demanded an unaffordable two months' rent in advance.

The employer agreed to place me in a French host family for a month while I searched for accommodation. I was elated since it meant I would not have to worry about rent or bills until I found my bearings in Paris. Contrary to au pair participants, I had no prior knowledge of the family I would be staying with or what they looked like. This information was not important to me as my stay was temporary. For au pairs with a one-year commitment, having at least one video interview with their host family before traveling to Ireland was important.[45] However, I received their address, ages, and names in an email written in French. When I arrived at the airport, I took a taxi to their home in Ecole Militaire, an affluent neighbourhood in close proximity to the Eifel Tower.

Despite the fact, that "Emily in Paris" was not on television at the time, I felt like the character since I was an anglophone foreigner in a major metropolitan area who was astounded by all the sights and dazzling lights. A couple in their late sixties answered the door when I rang the doorbell. Since they did not speak English and I had poor

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[45] Majority of au pair participants reported having an online interview with the host mother and her children. In some interviews, the host father was present but did not ask many questions, while in others, the au pair only met the host father in person when they arrived in Ireland.

French, their daughter came over for the day to translate. She was in her early thirties. She led me to my room to put down my luggage and provided a tour of their opulent residence. On the first day, their daughter informed me that I could use the kitchen and showed me which bathroom to use; the other bathroom was solely for the hosts. She never explained whether I was permitted to use the sitting room, so I avoided it for the duration of my stay. Also, as the hosts were present most evenings, I did not wish to bother them. I went to my room after their daughter had departed. My room already had a wardrobe full of clothes and blankets, as well as a desk loaded with books, so I was forced to spend a month living out of my suitcase, with limited room to personalize the space.[46]

On the first night, I didn't know what to do for dinner and I did not feel comfortable using their kitchen. While lying on my bed, I ate a bag of crisps and some chocolate that I had bought at the airport. The host made me coffee the following morning and instructed me to drink it in a bowl. I had breakfast sitting alone in their dining room, admiring a stunning window that opened out onto a balcony overlooking the Eiffel tower. It was beautiful but also very solitary. After the first week, things improved and I felt a little more at ease moving around their house, but I was still uncomfortable there and I constantly felt like an intruder. I spent as much time as I could outside the house, only coming inside to sleep, shower, and 'skype' my family.

Because I did not work for this family, I cannot draw parallels between my experience and that of my au pair participants. Instead, I want to highlight how important the first week and the early stages of involvement with a host family were for the vast majority of my au pair participants. An au pair is usually immersed in a new country, new

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[46] See Burikova (2006) in Chapter Seven for more detail on the au pair bedroom.

language, new job, and new home simultaneously. In many cases, a warm welcome and clear boundaries can help them adjust to the new environment. The first stage can influence an au pair's overall experience with their host families.

As described in Chapter Four, host families have the advantage of establishing and negotiating the initial boundaries that shape their relationship with an au pair. This process begins during the interview stage. Host families establish 'first contact' with possible au pairs and ask questions to see whether the au pair is a 'good fit' for their family.[47] Typically, an au pair's responsibilities and the overall framework of their relationship with their hosts are established within the first few weeks of their arrival. In order to comprehend how au pairs may tactfully negotiate and set boundaries in homes that do not belong to them, I will continue to use the theoretical framework of boundary work to explore their experiences in this chapter. I argue that some au pairs can actively influence boundary processes within their host family's home by choosing whether to be seen as employees or integral family members.[48] As outlined in Chapter Four, the distinction is not absolute; instead, it exists along a spectrum. Au pairs may shift between desiring to be treated as employees or family members based on circumstances and interactions with the host family. Furthermore, I will incorporate Hochschild's theory of emotional labour into this research since it resonates with the experiences revealed by au pairs throughout the interview process in particular. Their stories emphasized the essential timing of their efforts, as they were especially keen to impress their host families and build a strong connection. This

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[47] AuPair World provides host families with a template of questions to ask their prospective au pair. During the interview stage, the majority of host families in this research followed this form as a guideline. See online https://www.AuPair World.com/en/wiki/questions-to-au-pairs

[48] See Chapter Four for Walman's (1978) framework of boundary processes.

enthusiasm prompted them to make compromises, put in extra effort, and engage in emotional labour as a favour, assuming that their actions would be matched with reciprocal gestures from their hosts. Similarly, host families also thought that they negotiated and made compromises with the au pair. However, au pairs were typically shocked to learn that having close, familial relationships frequently entailed both acknowledged and unacknowledged work. Employers in London's au pair programs, according to Cox and Narula (2003), exploit the language of the family to demand more labour from immigrant women who are providing in-home care. On the other hand, other host families established definite boundaries, which led to interactions that were more detached and rigid.

Boundary work and Emotional Labour:

As discussed in Chapter Four, the utilization of the term 'boundary work' served as a valuable concept to comprehend how host families employ strategies to either 'integrate' or 'segmentate' an au pair within their family. In Chapter Four, challenges related to the host families implementation of these strategies were explored. The real-life intricacies of initiating an au pair into a household were highlighted, stressing the dynamic and fluid nature of the process. This is crucial, as host families play a decisive role in shaping the dynamics of family or workplace connections. Researchers continue to attribute varying levels of meaning to the phrase boundary work. Boundary work is defined by Nippert-Eng (1995:7) as "the strategies, principles, and practices we use to create, maintain, and modify cultural categories." She investigates how employees negotiate the home/work divide by organizing realm-specific issues, people, materials, and identity. However, in this chapter, I'd like to expand on the concept of boundary work to argue that au pairs 'do' engage in boundary work, albeit

in a more subtle way, and to demonstrate how emotional labour particularly at 'first contact' may contradict their boundary work.

Several studies have demonstrated that immigration status has a substantial influence on the employment and exploitation of domestic workers and au pairs (Anderson 2000; 2009; 2013; Yodanis and Lauer 2005; Búriková 2015). According to Anderson (2000), host families are drawn to migrant labour not just because they (migrants) are ready to accept lower salaries, but also because of their flexibility. Migrant domestic employees frequently have fewer external obligations that might interfere with their caring tasks. Their legal status within a country is dependent on the regulatory structures that control their admission into the country (Anderson 2013), rendering them more susceptible to exploitation. Likewise, Hess and Puckhaber (2004) emphasize au pairs' precarious bargaining position in negotiating their working terms, particularly those from Central and Eastern Europe. This vulnerability derives from their lack of understanding of their rights and obligations, as well as their reliance on employers for their residency status. Hess and Puckhaber state that au pairs from these locations suffer substantial hurdles in voicing their needs and rights as a result. In a similar vein, when focusing on non-European au pairs in my research, a noteworthy factor revolved around the considerable expenses linked to return flights to their home countries. Additionally, they needed lodging in Ireland to facilitate their pursuit of English language courses or university studies. Ann (31),[49] an au pair from Brazil, echoed this sentiment.

> The problem is not the job [au pairing] the problem is it's not a legal job so they can do whatever they want. They can pay you 50 euro or nothing because they know you need a place to stay, and we are students and need to pay for college. I have to work weekends as a housekeeper in a hotel, so I had to change families because I needed to work weekends.

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[49] See below for more ethnographic information about Ann.

Correspondingly, Búriková (2015) points out that there exists a power imbalance between Slovak au pairs and host families in London, resulting in au pairs having little control over their living and working conditions. Búriková outlines several factors contributing to this unequal relationship and the subsequent lack of negotiating power for au pairs. She highlights that the migrant status of au pairs, combined with their different economic standing, is a critical factor in establishing this disparity, as au pairs often stand to lose more financially than host families if they decide to leave their positions. Moreover, many au pairs are hesitant to depart because they view their time in London as a rite of passage and are reluctant to perceive it as a failure. Additionally, au pairs may grapple with a lack of knowledge and language proficiency in their host country, making them feel intimidated and reliant on their hosts, particularly during the initial stages of their stay. This, in turn, contributes to feelings of anxiety within the host family's home, as au pairs struggle to grasp the household routine and discern where it is acceptable to move freely around their hosts home.

Furthermore, Búriková (2015: 45) illustrates how au pairs engage in 'gossip' with their fellow au pairs as a means of comparing their individual experiences with their host families. This exchange of information serves as a valuable resource for assessing whether their employment conditions are acceptable or unacceptable. According to Búriková this information holds significant strategic value, prompting au pairs to make critical evaluations about their host families. They must decide whether to continue in their current situation, seek placement with a different host family, explore alternative job opportunities, or perhaps even return to Slovakia. The characterization of host families as either 'good' or 'bad' underscores the inherent power imbalance in the au pair- host family relationship, where the family possesses the authority to shape the

nature of the relationship, whether it leans towards "exploitative or generous, friendly or cold" (ibid: 45).

Similarly, Cox (2015) asserts that au pairs in the UK have a poor negotiating position since they find it difficult to protest for fear of being treated coldly by host families, resulting in an unwelcoming or hostile atmosphere. In line with Búriková (2015) and Cox's (2015) insights, the majority of au pair participants in my study described feeling uneasy in their host family's home, particularly during the first week. My research contributes to and expands this body of literature by outlining and explaining some of the subtle tactics used by au pairs to regain control within their host family homes.

Au pairs are made aware of the financial and actual ownership of the home by the position of 'living in.' As noted, by Búriková (2015) au pairs seldom felt at ease in someone else's house, especially during the first week of adjustment. While the rules used by host families to limit or control the au pairs' visitors or restrict their access to certain areas of their home are an explicit manifestation of the asymmetric power balance in relation to the house (Cox and Narula 2004), for many au pairs the problems stem from their perception that they simply do not understand the household and its rhythms, social rules, and expectations (Búriková 2006; 2015). [50]

They find themselves uncertain about food ownership, the timing and locations for meals, the appropriateness of watching television with the family, experiencing guilt when not spending evenings with their hosts, deciding whether to store their toiletries in commonly shared bathrooms, deliberating on whether to decorate walls with pictures or place them in communal living areas, and making choices regarding

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[50] See Chapter Six for more details on rhythms and routines and Chapter Three for imagined expectations of au pairing and hosting.

returning home late on weekends or even staying out entirely. Many au pairs noted that upon their arrival, they experienced a deep sense of self-consciousness that went beyond their preconceived expectations. [51]. The sheer fact that they didn't know when or where it was suitable for them to be in this new residence caused tremendous concern. It is worth noting that this situation is not exclusive to au pairs; it is a common experience for any group of strangers living together for the first time, as demonstrated in the vignette at the outset of this chapter. Nevertheless, au pairs receive compensation [pocket money] from their host families, placing them in a complex position where they are perceived as both family members and employees.

Au pairs, however, employed less overt strategies given their relative lack of control over these boundaries compared to their hosts families. For example, au pairs may refuse an invitation to spend time with the family and spend their free time in their room or outside the host's home. For example, Nadine (see below) refused to spend most evenings with the host family because she didn't want a "bad habit" to form instead she created clear boundaries that marked her bedroom as a private space. Au pairs demonstrate their desire for personal space and independence by declining invites to spend excessive time with the host family. Nadine made a conscious decision to restrict the time she spent with the host family in order to minimize the creation of harmful habits and to stress her need for seclusion. On the other hand, au pairs may push boundaries and spend "too much time" with the host family. For example, Niamh and Tom (see Chapter Seven) stated that their au pair became too intrusive on their space, and they had to hide in their own home to escape her intrusive behaviour.

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[51] See Chapter Three for au pair expectations.

Au pairs may eat outside their host family homes or au pairs may request to make dinner for the family to have autonomy over their food choices. For instance, Evie (28) an au pair from Spain asked her host mother could she do the weekly shopping and evening meals because she did not like the host mother's food choices or cooking. This was extra work for Evie, but she stated, "I acted like I was doing the mom a favour ha-ha". Evie stated that the host mother praised her for this extra work, but Evie got to buy, prepare, and eat the foods that she likes providing her with a sense of agentic choice.

Au pairs may ask to take the children outside the home to socialise with other au pairs during their 'working' hours. Mandina (29) an au pair from Italy, offered every weekend to take the dog for a walk because she needed to get out of her host families house during Covid-19 lockdowns. She felt that using the dog as an excuse to leave but was also favoured by her hosts and she was treated better at weekends. The host family did not ask for "anything on the weekends that I did that".

However, what are the host families' reactions or emotions regarding the boundaries set (or attempted to be set) by the au pair? Bridget (45), a single mother of two residing in Wicklow, shared her perspective by stating,

> Gretta [au pair] arrived. She is Spanish. She is lovely, again, she was 24-year-old and she'd been used to living on her own, so I had to say no no I don't need you in your room or, I want you to eat with us. I want you to be part of the family. I want you to join us. But she [Gretta] said your time with your kids is so precious. I said I am fine with all that, I have enough time with them ha-ha. I want adult company sometimes. Not that, like, I love that all my au pairs have spent time in the room, but, and it was unusual for me to say please eat with us more or don't feel you have to be out with your friends and if you want to be out with your friends that's fine but just know that you're welcome at our dinner table and at the breakfast table, and, so with everyone there was challenges. but you learn to be direct, and address issues, head on.

After Bridget's conversation with Gretta [au pair], Bridget observed that Gretta proceeded to give Bridget and her family some alone time by declining meal

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invitations and opting for less family interaction in the evenings. Bridget understood that Gretta used this approach to have some personal space, and Bridget respected her decision. To avoid being bothersome, Bridget stopped extending meal and family gathering invitations to Gretta. Bridget was initially upset because having an au pair in her household was the additional adult company she felt she needed being a single mother. At the same, she recognised that Gretta "did her job well and I can't complain".

These instances provide light on the complex dynamics of au pair boundary work in the face of power disparities. Au pair's techniques include strategic decisions and activities aimed at establishing and maintaining personal boundaries within their host family situations (see case studies below). Au pairs may handle disparities in power with delicacy and elegance, as opposed to host families, who may more overtly define and impose their boundaries (see Chapter Four).

In contrast, some au pairs attempted to establish boundaries at the start of their stay with host families, however, power imbalances sometimes led to the rejection of au pair boundaries. For example, Ann (see above) demonstrated that she had limited negotiating power with her host family but attempted to create boundaries at the start of her stay. Her host family household comprises a single mother and an 11-year-old boy. Her host mother is from Argentina and works as a teacher and at the weekends in a nightclub. Ann agreed to provide childcare for two hours every day without pay in exchange for food and lodging. Ann saw a post on Facebook by this host mother. The post stated that she was looking for an au pair to help mind her 11-year-old son for only 2 hours a day, the post did not mention pay or pocket money and it was only mentioned in a private message to Ann. Ann stated that she only agreed to this arrangement because she was transitioning from English classes to college to study

business and needed extra time, and because the host mother's son didn't get home until 3 p.m., it suited her. She also could not find another host family that was flexible with Ann's college schedule as she finished college at 2.15pm and as the boy was 11 years old, she didn't need to pay him as much attention so she could study. At the weekend Ann works as a cleaner in a hotel and then has to go back to her host family to mind the child when the mother leaves for work. Ann recalled one weekend when the mother didn't return as planned and Ann had to wait at home with the boy until the mother got back very late without an explanation or an apology. Ann had to cancel work that day because she didn't want to leave the child home alone and expressed her anger and annoyance to the host mother, who responded, "if you want to find somewhere to rent, you'd have to pay 600 euro a month, you are lucky". Ann told me she started to realise that this mother was struggling, and she started to feel empathy for her:

> I don't think she has much money to pay me, it is a very simple, basic house and I don't think the dad is around to help. The food is very cheap and basic with not much meat and not a lot of food, but I don't mind that because I am in college most days. You try to have a connection with the family maybe have a cup of tea with them and pretend to be family, but it is only pretending. You are never family you are a stranger and it's not your home. You try to be happy. But you don't make family cook and clean for you but when she [host mother] had a friend's birthday party last weekend, I had to babysit, and I wasn't invited. I don't get paid either. she said to me you work for us, and you have to be here because it's your job. I was in town the other day and the host mom texted and asked me to pick up milk and some other bits, the hotel I work in don't do that - I get paid by hour and go home. I told her no because I was already on the bus home, and I didn't want to go to the shop. She was annoyed with me when I got home but I didn't want it to become a habit. I think Irish host mothers are better, but I only have one experience so can't compare.
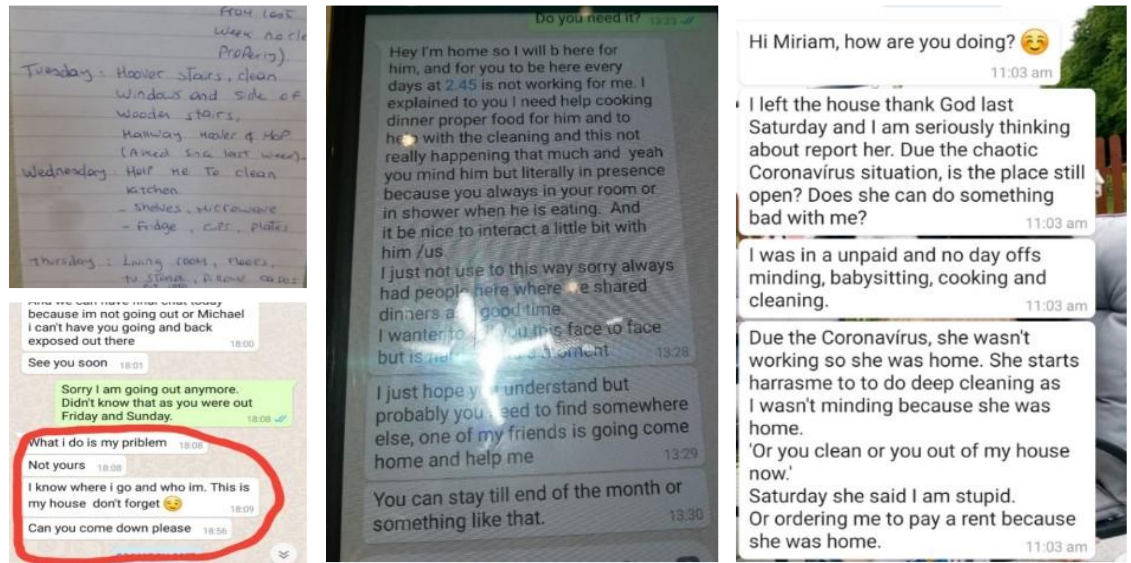
Figure 13. Text exchanges from Ann

Ann's immigration status had a significant impact on her employment conditions and restricted her ability to negotiate boundaries. Ann arrived in Ireland on a student visa, which had specific requirements. To maintain her visa status, she was obligated to attend college classes, with restrictions on working hours - a maximum of 20 hours per week during term time and 40 hours per week during college vacation periods (Citizens Information 2023). Nonetheless, Ann persevered through these circumstances because challenging her host mother posed a threat to her housing stability. Ann's host mother was aware of the prohibitively high rent costs in Dublin, and whenever Ann attempted to set boundaries or voice concerns about her unfair treatment, her host mother would highlight the daunting expense of rent, thereby undercutting Ann's ability to assert herself effectively.[52] This underscores the

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[52] It's important to note that Ann did not come from an economically disadvantaged background; in Ireland, she would be classified as middle class due to her university degree and profession. Ann holds a degree in food engineering and had a well-paying job in a Brazilian company. To secure a student visa for her studies in Ireland, Ann was required to demonstrate financial stability, with a minimum of 10,000 euros in her bank account to support herself upon arrival. Ann said a lot of that money went towards business classes in addition to her English classes.

substantial impact of immigration status on the employment dynamics and vulnerability of au pairs (Anderson 2000; 2009; 2013; Yodanis and Lauer 2005; Hess and Puckhaber 2004; Búriková 2015). Ann's immigration status also intersected with other factors, such as her inflexible schedule, which weakened her bargaining power with her host mother.

According to Cox (2015), au pairs often struggle to assert or express themselves due to concerns about how their host families will react, potentially leading to an unwelcoming or unpleasant environment. Ann mentioned that she tried to establish a connection with her host mother to make their living environment more pleasant, even though she did not feel like part of the family. This situation reflects the findings of Anderson (2000), who observed that the concept of belonging to a family frequently emerged in her interviews with migrant domestic workers in several European countries. This rhetoric of being part of the family was often used by employers and some employees to navigate conflicts arising from the commodification of domestic employment. Anderson argued that employing familial language diminished employees' ability to negotiate their terms of employment. In Ann's case study, she tried to act like a family member and put on a pleasant demeanour, even though she knew deep down that she wasn't truly considered part of the family. She tolerated this treatment because returning to Brazil wasn't an option for her, as she needed to complete her college courses in Ireland. Unlike European au pairs who had the flexibility to attend language lessons and return flights to their home country were affordable. Ann's scheduling constraints limited her ability to be selective with host families and find ones that aligned with her timetable.

Ann's case study highlights the challenges of boundary work for au pairs, which may be impeded by factors such as immigration status and rigid schedules. However, the

section below will illuminate instances where some au pairs have effectively managed boundary work.

Boundary work strategies

Other studies have revealed how au pairs and nannies 'do' boundary work with the mother of the children they were caring for in order not to jeopardize her 'real' motherhood (Anderson 2000; Búriková 2019; Cheever 2003; Cox 2011; Macdonald 1998). Stubberud (2015) uses the notions of boundary work and affective labour to analyse the work that au pairs do that partially counts as labour. According to Stubberud (2015), au pairs do this by deciding what levels of emotional involvement in the family are acceptable, which aids them in negotiating their position within the family. According to Stubberud (2015: 131), au pairs are not "on home soil" and are at a disadvantage when compared to host families who also do affective (boundary) work.

According to Lan (2003), boundary work is done by domestic workers to establish and uphold boundaries inside the home. For example, Lan (2003) investigates this through the theoretical lens of Goffman's (1959) "front" and "backstage" metaphors. "Backstage" is how domestic employees behave in public settings away from their employers' houses, whereas "front stage" is how they behave in the homes of their employers. According to Lan (2003), some domestic workers prefer to combine these two spaces, while others want to divide them. Lan states that domestic workers 'do' boundary work by either accepting the apparent class and ethnic distinctions or rejecting them and identify as class equals of their employers as well as equal human beings. In agreement with Lan (2003), I contend that some au pairs are able to exert agency in these boundary work processes within their host family's home by deciding

whether they want to be regarded as an employee or as part of the family. As mentioned in Chapter Four, this is not an either-or scenario, rather it lies on a spectrum and au pairs can fluctuate between wanting to be an employee or a family member depending on circumstances and experience with their host family. In the two case studies below, I will explore the experiences and interactions of two au pairs who adopted different strategies.

Nadine: "I am not family"

On a Saturday morning in October 2020, I spoke to Nadine on her day off. Ireland was under level 5 lockdown, so we had to meet over Skype. I enjoyed talking to au pairs digitally as they were mostly in their bedrooms, and I got an insight into their intimate spaces. Nadine is a 28-year-old woman from Germany. During the Covid-19 lockdown in the summer of 2020, she worked as an au pair for Niamh and Tom (See Chapter Seven). In Germany, she was learning to become a vocational instructor for students aspiring to be nursery schoolteachers.[53] Her program required her to spend three months abroad in an English-speaking country. Covid-19 was not on her travel plans, but she frequently said that "it's just for three months" and that she will "put up with it."

> Coming to Ireland as an au pair was not my original plan especially not during Covid-19. My first thought was to go abroad as an exchange student, but there are limited spots for people to go and I didn't get one so I had to find a plan B. Plan B needed to be flexible and, also not that expensive because in Germany I have to pay for my apartment and my bills and I have to pay my student credit loan and everything so I had to find something that suits for all those things. I decided to be an au pair [Nadine laughs uncomfortably]. The pocket money that I receive does not pay my bills but thankfully I have savings that help. But I can do this because it's just 3 months I will be okay. So yeah, that's why I am doing it during COVID.

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[53] Now that she has her degree, she is employed in Germany as an online teacher.

(Nadine 2020)

Nadine was only in Ireland to complete a college requirement; unlike the majority of au pairs in this research, she was not on a journey of cultural exchange. On AuPair World, Niamh and Tom made 'first contact' with Nadine. They wrote her a message saying, "We like your profile; can we set up a video interview?" When Nadine glanced over their profile, she assumed they were a good family from the countryside. She said that because she was only there for three months and because Ireland and Germany went into lockdown, rural Ireland was ideal. She claimed that if she had been staying longer and the lockdown had ended, she would have preferred Dublin or Cork. On their profile, she also saw that they had a farm where they keep a number of animals. This was a problem for Nadine because she dislikes animals but still proceeded to set up an online interview with them. From the AuPair World interview template, Niamh and Tom had created some straightforward questions for Nadine. According to Nadine, they questioned her about her experience taking care of children, whether or not she could drive, and a little bit about her life and her family in Germany. She learned about Tom and Niamh's contract as well as their daily schedule and family rhythms from them. Although everything was "wonderful," she added, "I needed to question them about the animals." She informed Tom and Niamh that she dislikes animals and asked them to reassure her that they would be contained outdoors behind fences. If she were to become their new au pair, they promised to make sure their dog stayed outside and that all farm animals would be kept outdoors and under control. Here, based on specifications that matched her needs, Nadine created and negotiated boundaries with her host families. This was made easier as it was negotiated before she was in their home and not under any real or imagined threat of termination.

After accepting the au pair post with Niamh and Tom, Nadine departed Germany shortly after. Nadine signed and sent back the au pair contract and daily schedule that Niamh and Tom had supplied to her through email.[54] Niamh collected her from the airport in Dublin and they engaged in small talk for the journey. Niamh informed her that Dublin was in lockdown and hopefully it would reopen for her to visit during her stay.

Niamh and Tom wanted to integrate their au pair into the family and encouraged their au pair to have a drink with them in the evening and watch television. This was stated in the contract that they sent to Nadine (see table below).

We want our au pair to be comfortable in our home and feel part of the family rather than a guest. Everyone helps and cleans and tidies up after themselves and after family meals.
The au pair is always welcome to use the kitchen and cook for the family anytime! As part of our cultural exchange, it would be nice if the Au pair cooked an evening meal of their choice once a week. We can get ingredients in advance if required.
We normally have a drink and watch TV in the living room after the children are gone to bed. You are welcome to join us and relax with us, we encourage this rather than you are confining yourself to your room. It gives you a chance to learn English through us and the TV in a relaxed way.

Figure 14: Niamh and Tom's contract for au pairs

The first week of Nadine's stay was challenging; she explained that because of her age, she had been living an independent life outside of her 'real' family for a few years and had navigated her house and life the way she pleased. She was not sure where she belonged in Niamh and Tom's house. Nadine stated

> Back in Germany I loved being by myself for a couple of years already. I took care of myself, I clean up the house the way I wanted to do it, I cook whatever I wanted to. I was really responsible for myself for a long time already. So, I think it's the biggest challenge at the beginning was to be back in a family, and all like this, what goes along with being in a family dispute like was their rules

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[54] See Chapter Seven for more details about Niamh and Tom's contract and duties documents.

and their ways of doing things. I think this is kind of the biggest challenge for me. But I knew this before I know I was like okay you know this for three months so it's okay for me… but I think this is kind of bothering me, the most that is kind of to find my place in the family, which is also not my family. So, you know you're still also like in the position you're still working for them, so you still also have to be like polite and friendly and everything, which makes it a little harder. In my real family where I could you know say everything what I think in the moment I'm thinking. So, this is kind of the difference, and this is a little challenging but yeah, it's okay.

Contrary to the hosts' contract and the usual understanding of an au pair's role, Nadine had no desire to become an additional family member in Niamh and Tom's home. But because she wanted to be liked by her new hosts, she "pasted on a happy face" during her work hours and withdrew to her room as soon as Niamh ended her workday. During the first few weeks, she wanted to establish a pattern that was comfortable for her, not only her new hosts. Unfortunately, because of the pandemic, she had little opportunity to leave her host's home. She explained,

> I really try to find a routine for my days you know that I could like what I could do everything to, to have something to do [laugh awkwardly]. So, I start every morning with some yoga, because I did this in Germany already and it's good for me, and this is the only time when it's really quiet in the house because everybody is still asleep. Just me doing yoga. Then I start work at 8. Together with Niamh we get the kids ready for school and I make their snacks and everything for school, and I drive them to school. Then I'm back around 9.20am and do little household things; like cleaning up the living room and the kitchen, cleaning the floors and the children's bedroom. And then I'm off, because both of the kids are in school. So, mostly I either go for a big walk or I do some exercises on YouTube. I think the only reason I do this is because I know this is just for first three months when I'm back in Germany I don't do this anymore. So right now, I'm absolutely fine with doing it. Then at around 11.40 I go to collect the smaller girl at her school. And then, we spend hours together. Mostly at home in the house, mostly in the living room, that's where she likes to play. Tom is mostly around the house and says "hi" because he works on the farm and in the living room sometimes. I play with her, and we have lunch together sometimes we prepare that together, sometimes she's watching tv too. And then yeah, around 3pm I pick up the bigger girl from school and normally we do homework for one hour and that's kind of my workday and then Niamh comes down from her office at home. So, I'm done with work. And I also go back to my room then because I really like to be myself then. because I like quiet, and I also call my girlfriend at that time. then I come out for dinner, I might spend the evening a little with them. They invited me a lot of times to spend like the whole evening with them watching TV or

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something. I'm not really into it I really appreciate the offer and everything but for me I want space that's my personality that I really like to spend time by myself to read a book or listen to an audiobook or watch tv shows that I really like to watch. Yeah, and I do this often in English, so I think it's still fine I still get some practice in English. So, yeah, that's kind of my day.

Nadine conducted boundary work with her host family by establishing and maintaining initial boundaries. She accomplished this by segregating her personal and professional lives. She respectfully refused to be a part of her hosts' family, especially in the evenings, since this was her time to switch off and phone family, friends, and her girlfriend back home, to watch what she wanted to watch on television, and to be herself without a "smile painted on my face". To finish the daily performance of an au pair, her bedroom became her "backstage." (Goffman 1959). But her "front stage," particularly in the first few weeks, morphed into a form of "emotional labor" (Hochschild 1983). Similar to findings by Lan (2003:539) who states that

> during the week, domestic workers "act like maids" in front of the audience, their employers. Yet, on Sundays, the most common rest day for migrant workers in Taiwan, they display a distinct "offstage" identity beyond the direct observation of their employers. This "backstage" region is situated in public space, which ironically provides migrant workers with more freedom and privacy.

Goffman (1959:78) suggests that within societies, there tends to be a distinction between an informal or 'backstage' language of behaviour and another 'frontstage' language of behaviour reserved for public performances. In the 'backstage' setting, this language encompasses

> reciprocal first-naming, co-operative decision-making, profanity, open sexual remarks, elaborate griping, smoking, rough informal dress, 'sloppy' sitting and standing posture, use of dialect or sub-standard speech, mumbling and shouting, playful aggressivity and 'kidding,' inconsiderateness for the other in minor but potentially symbolic acts, minor physical self-involvements such as humming, whistling, chewing, nibbling, belching, and flatulence.

(ibid:78)

Consequently, the 'frontstage' can be considered as the absence or opposite of these behaviours. Actions occurring in the 'backstage' may be perceived "as symbolic of intimacy and disrespect for others present and for the region." (ibid:78). In contrast, front region conduct is characterized by the avoidance of such potentially offensive behaviours.

However, Goffman (1959) fails to bridge an emotional gap between front and stage. Hochschild's (1983) research on emotional labour aims to bridge this emotional gap. Although Hochschild drew inspiration from Goffman's front and backstage research, she sought to diverge from Goffman's perception of the self as a composite of numerous roles and performances. Hochschild introduced the concept of 'emotional labor' to demonstrate how individuals navigate their emotions within specific social contexts and with particular individuals. Her research focused on flight attendants working for Delta Airlines in the United States of America. Flight attendants (primarily female) in her research were expected to conform to a specific behavioural ideal of a female flight attendant. This ideal flight attendant embodied qualities such as hospitality, friendliness, flirtatiousness, and resilience in the face of impolite customers. It also influenced specific grooming and clothing norms. This research shed light on expectations and constraints experienced primarily by female employees (Hochschild 1983: 127-128).

Hochschild's concerns came from what she perceived as a lack of connection in Goffman's framework. Hochschild (1983: 225) argued that Goffman's representation of reality lacked a "structural bridge between all situations", inadequately proving an

explanation of how a person maintains consistency across different moments. Hochschild recognised two major problems with Goffman's viewpoint. First, she thought it meant that people were passive and devoid of interior experiences, guided exclusively by societal conventions. Hochschild identified occasions in which people introspect or participate with their environment without feeling watched, which Goffman seemed to ignore. She claimed that agency and internalised emotional norms were fundamental to emotion regulation and lived "inside" the actor, acting as a "bridge between all situations" (ibid: 225-228). This prompted her to create the concept of an inner essence or true self. Second, Hochschild critiqued Goffman for failing to account for how people use past expectations to negotiate unexpected circumstances. Goffman's theory lacked an overall pattern connecting various "collections" of roles (ibid: 225). Previous expectations, in Hochschild's opinion, imply the presence of a previous self that possesses these expectations.

Hochschild found the notion that a person's behaviours and emotions may change based on the situation and environment was incorrect. She believed in the continuity of a person's acts and emotions, which she attributed to the presence of an inner "real self" and that

> we make up an idea of our "real self"; an inner jewel that remains our unique possession no matter whose billboard is on our back or whose smile is on our face. We push this "real self" further inside, making it more inaccessible. Subtracting credibility from the parts of our emotional machinery that are in commercial hands, we turn to what is left to find out who we "really are".
>
> (Hochschild 1983: 34).

In contrast, Goffman (1959) argued that there was no clear line separating genuine performances from impostor ones; all performances were genuine in the sense that they simply took place; there was no constant core representing the 'real' self, only a changing and growing range of roles that individuals played.

With Hochschild's criticisms in mind, Nadine wanted to be a good au pair, so she kept a positive attitude during her "working" hours in front of the family and refrained from criticizing the routines of her hosts' home if there were any issues, in contrast to her "real" family, with whom she would speak candidly. As stated by Hochschild:

> In the course of doing this physical and mental labor, she is also doing something more, something I define as emotional labor. This labor requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others-in this case, the sense of being cared for in a convivial and safe place. This kind of labor calls for a coordination of mind and feeling, and it sometimes draws on a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality. I use the term emotional labor to mean the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value.
>
> <div align="right">(Hochschild
1983:7)</div>

Even though Nadine took responsibility for establishing boundaries to segregate herself from her host family rather than integrating herself as the family had desired, she was nevertheless conscious of her place in the family and saw herself as an employee who was paid to perform a certain type of labour. Labour that required emotional work. We see this also illustrated in the accounts of other participants, such as Linda, a 19-year-old au pair from France, who echoed Nadine's sentiments when she said that in the beginning of her au pair experience, she was ashamed to go out to a nightclub for fear that her host would think she was reckless. However, due to Linda's young age and inexperience, she did not actively engage in boundary work at the start of her au pair journey, which is why she was caught between having a family-like feeling and working as an employee.

> Researcher: Did you feel like part of the family?
>
> Linda: I did, and I didn't because they were so kind, I'd eat dinner with them, and they'd always tell me take whatever you want. If I was going somewhere they would ask: "Oh, where are you going?" "Do you have enough change for

the bus?" so in a way, yeah. But then at the weekend, if they were doing something with their family, they wouldn't ask me like they'd just leave. I would have liked sometimes to do things. So, the kids as well see that I get along with the parents so we create some relationship, so it would be easier. It's easier for them to listen or understand me. Yeah, we did not really do that.

Researcher: Did you feel like you were an employee then?

Linda: yes and no. Because at the weekend I would come back home at five in the morning pretty smashed most of the time. Like one day, I forgot my keys, I just rang the dad. It was like five in the morning. I was smashed. And I felt so bad about calling him, but I had to. So, he just opened the door looked at me and was like "hmmmm". It was grand he didn't say anything after. I didn't feel like I was their little lady to do everything. Yeah. And you get used to it. At first like I didn't really want to go out because I thought what they are going to think if I come back to late. I'd be like "oh my god like, what are they going to think I'm not responsible or not" and, in the end, I met some people and went out.

Lisa, a 19 year old au pair from Germany, indicated much like Nadine, that she really liked her host family but didn't want to get too attached because she was conscious of the temporary nature of her situation from the beginning. She acknowledged that she was doing 'emotional labor' since she was averse to saying anything that would offend her host family.

I really like them and I will miss them, but I don't get too deep into relationships because I'm old enough to know that [after] one year, of my whole life and I don't want to cry, my life moves on and they will get a new au pair. She might be lovely and she will probably be better than me. I do not know… you know like, it was hard… because I went to Germany for two weeks at Christmas. And to not think about what you are saying, not to be so under control with your family or just the 'nice you' in the family. Yeah, you can have bad days, but you are still smiling with a smile on your face. Yes, I cannot just sit back and really relax. but I did with my actual family at Christmas. I can never say leave me alone, but I can say that at home, "just go I need my time".

(Lisa, 2020)

Some au pairs found it difficult to set boundaries, particularly in the early phases of their relationships when they were seeking to impress their new hosts while performing emotional labour. As we will see in the next case study, this had an

unpleasant influence on Mora's tenure as an au pair, but it also benefited her in establishing boundaries with a new host family while requesting to perform childcare rather than cleaning. She did clean for her new host family, but it was not emotional labour to make them happy; rather, it was cleaning their house as if it were her own. Additionally, her past expectations and experiences aided Mora in negotiating unexpected circumstances. Mora's example is significant because it underscores that emotional labour can play a role in actively engaging in boundary work.

Mora: integration and emotional labour.

Mora moved to Ireland in 2018 from Spain at the age of 24 and started working as an au pair for a family in Wicklow. She is presently employed at a crèche in Wicklow. She has two university degrees in teaching and pedagogy. Her first host family consisted of a mother and father, a son who was 13 years old, and two daughters who were 9 and 8 years old. She received 100 euros plus room and board for working 25 hours per week, plus additional babysitting duties during the week and on occasion at the weekends. When she made 'first contact' with her host family it was an online interview with the mother and children. The host father was not present. Mora said that the host mother explained the contract verbally to her and told her because of her qualifications she will be mainly looking after the children and only doing light housework. Mora wanted to impress her host family during her first week there, so she offered to assist with extra chores, such as ironing the children's and host parents' clothes. Mora spent more time cleaning than looking after the children during the first week, so the following week she decided to focus on interacting with the children, and the host mother said to Mora, "Oh Mora, you forgot to iron the clothes", to which Mora replied, "oh I am sorry, I thought you'd prefer for me to look after the children." The mother smiled and exclaimed, "but you are so good at cleaning, I could never be

that good". Mora spent the majority of her time cleaning for this family, and in her spare time she tried to escape the house as often as she could. Mora explained why she stayed with this family, "I wanted to learn English and I just chose to put up with this. The host mother made me feel bad about my English, telling me that it was terrible and that I should be practicing more instead of spending time with Spanish people." She also revealed that the host father never spoke to her and avoided making conversation with her even at dinner, and on one occasion when Mora asked the host father "how was your day?" he spoke across her to the host mother stating, "I can't understand what she said." Mora felt invisible and underappreciated in their household.

She made the decision to speak out and inform the host mother that she would prefer to care for the children rather than clean. The host mother's frank and upsetting answer was "I think you should find a new host family". Mora was worried that she would have to go back to Spain if she could not find a new host family. She browsed AuPair World, discovered a family nearby looking for an au pair, and she got in touch with them. They answered quickly and Mora set up an in-person interview with them at their house on her day off. She informed them of her predicament and stated that she preferred to be an au pair rather than a cleaner. In the interview, Mora established distinct boundaries by articulating her perception of the responsibilities of an au pair and specifying the tasks she was willing and not willing to undertake.

The host family decided to employ Mora, and she expressed how warmly they welcomed her into their home.

> When I did the interview with my other family, they told me "don't worry for anything Mora, we really know what your situation is like. And when you're ready, we will be here for you." So, I've talked with my [first] host family and said I need a change and I am changing host family, but I can stay here as much time as you need. The host mother told me "Yes, that's fine Mora, you can

leave the house on Friday". So, I called the other family, and I said I have to leave the home on Friday. And they say to me, "don't worry because on Friday, we'll be there, we can help you with all your luggage and everything". So, the day when I had to leave the house, my friend came to help me pack and get ready. And on this day the host dad was ill, so he didn't go to work. He was home all day and didn't help me or anything. When my new host family arrived to help, I decided to say goodbye to the host dad and he just said, "fine bye" and that was it.

Mora embarked on her journey with her new host family, and thanks to their warm inclusion, she naturally began to integrate into their family dynamic. She adopted the perspective that household chores were not merely tasks but rather actions performed within a familial context, devoid of the sense of being a job. Consequently, Mora undertook boundary work with her new host family as a direct consequence of her previous encounter involving emotional labour with her initial host family. Nevertheless, the innate nature of au pairing as a form of paid care work involves emotional labour. I am not contending that Mora did not engage in emotional labour with her new host family. Instead, her initial attempt to impress her first host family resulted in her taking on a role more aligned with cleaning rather than what she perceived as the typical responsibilities of an au pair such as to care for children. Consequently, this prompted her to actively 'do' boundary work with her host family.

Even though Mora received payment from her new host family for her role as an au pair and was keen on making a favourable impression, she didn't perceive this as an imposed obligation. Instead, the emotional labour she undertook was a reflection of her 'real self'. This aligns with Hochschild's observation of moments when individuals engage with their surroundings without the feeling of being under scrutiny (Hochschild 1983). Mora's previous encounter with what she considered to be a "bad host family" informed her preferences and guided her in determining the qualities she

desired in her next host family. It also equipped her with the skills to negotiate social boundaries, contributing to a more enjoyable experience in her subsequent adventure.

Conclusion:

This chapter has explored explicit strategies employed by au pairs to establish boundaries with their host families. Nonetheless, the initial interaction between au pairs and host families carries significant weight as it sets the stage for making a positive first impression, a crucial goal for both parties involved. However, for au pairs, the concept of emotional labour often becomes intertwined with their perception of the expected au pair role. In the case of au pairs like Mora, who willingly took on additional tasks, this established a precedent that led to ongoing expectations of extra work from her host mother.

Conversely, in Nadine's case, she possessed a clear understanding of the role's expectations as an au pair and consciously performed these duties during designated "work" hours, while maintaining a boundary between herself and her host family during her personal time. This distinction allowed her to strike a balance.

However, it is important to note that in some instances, the practice of boundary work can yield negative consequences, potentially fostering a hostile environment for au pairs. In Ann's situation, it even led to threats of termination. 'Emotional labor' can thus intersect with boundary work, making it a complex and multifaceted aspect of the au pair experience.

In the upcoming chapter, I will delve further into the au pair experience, exploring how the relationships between au pairs and host families evolve over time.

Chapter Six: Rhythms and Routines

Introduction:

On one of my many visits to Tom and Niamh's home, I observed they had a visitor staying with them in addition to Rosalee, their au pair at the time. Tina (28) their previous au pair from Germany, was staying for the weekend. Tina walked through Tom, Niamh, and their children's home as though she were neither a guest nor a visitor. Additionally, she was aiding the children in getting dressed and ready for lunch in the nearby village. Because she was treating the children to lunch and taking them out for the day as one might expect of an older sibling, cousin or aunt and uncle.

I asked Niamh and Tom if they keep in contact with prior au pairs and invite them to visit their home. "We try to remain in touch with most of them and tell them that they are all welcome to come back and visit, but after a while we lose touch, but Tina is like family, and she comes and goes as she pleases, and we all adore her," they added. Tina worked as an au pair for Niamh and Tom's family two years ago and has since travelled throughout Ireland au pairing for several families. Currently, Tina is an au pair for a family in Kerry and occasionally spends the weekend with Niamh and Tom.

Niamh and Tom noted that it takes time to form a connection with au pairs and sometimes that connection never develops, and it becomes "like a business relationship". They reported that the relationship with Tina formed immediately. Tina's first day as an au pair, the sun was shining and the children wanted to play outside, so she took them outside. Tom was working from home in the living room, with a direct view of the garden, when he noticed Tina whizzing by on the children's scooter, with the children chasing after her. He stated that they were outside for several hours and that the children had a great time playing with their new au pair. Tom

remarked from that moment he knew she would be a good addition to the family and that evening Tom and Niamh encouraged her to have an alcoholic drink with them in their living room and they "got hammered and had a blast." [55] They have had several au pairs since then, and Tina comes to visit them frequently at weekends. On one occasion, she even brought her mother from Germany to stay with them. When I asked whether they had space for visitors and an au pair, they stated, "We will always make room for Tina and her family or whoever she brings to our house." Because Tina "is family," Niamh and Tom exhibited a greater willingness to bend the rules, boundaries, and overlook the contract for her during her time as an au pair, in contrast to other au pairs who joined their household. [56] This underscores their perception of Tina as an extended member of their family or, at the very least, an exceptionally close lifelong friend. With Tina no longer under an au pair contract with Niamh and Tom, their relationship has transitioned to a new phase.

In the previous three chapters, I looked at the expectations of au pairs and host families, as well as their early interactions with establishing boundaries. This chapter explores how the au pair's and host family's relationships develop over time. In doing so, I explain au pairs' and host families' experiences, as well as their rhythms and routines inside host families' homes. Furthermore, I will investigate how these rhythms and routines contribute towards if or how (whether or not) a 'family' is created. The term "rhythms" refers to the temporalities, structures, practices, and routines that exist in the daily and seasonal lives of the host family and au pair. It comprises recurring activities and household schedules that contribute to the overall structure and flow of their shared living environment. Mealtimes, sleeping schedules,

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[55] An Irish slang term indicating intoxication with alcohol is "hammered."

[56] For a detailed account of the contacts and boundaries made for au pairs by host families, see Chapters 4 and 7.

job routines, children's school schedules, and other everyday events have an influence on both the au pair and the host family's everyday lives. I learn about the dynamics of their relationship and how they impact the construction and growth or destruction of kin-like ties between the au pair and the host family by analysing these rhythms.

Tina remarked that she hasn't felt "like family" with the other host families she has been "working" for. Niamh and Tom's "like family" bond was exceptional. Similarly, Niamh and Tom didn't believe their past and present au pairs fulfilled Tina's "gold standards,"[57] therefore the "like family" bond never developed. Interestingly, following my house visit, I went for coffee with Rosalee (Niamh and Tom's au pair at the time), and she was irritated with their "unprofessional relationship" with Tina, saying "no one can be as perfect as Tina" [in a snide manner, rolling her eyes]. Rosalee mentioned that Niamh and Tom spoke highly of Tina even when she is not around, which made Rosalee feel that her job as an au pair was always being compared to Tina. I asked Rosalee was Tina's presence an inconvenience to her and Rosalee answered "no because they have a spare bed in the office for her, so she doesn't sleep near my room. And, when she is around it takes some pressure off me to be there, and I can enjoy my free time at the weekends". Rosalee spent a lot of her free time during weekends at Niamh and Tom's home because of Covid-19 restrictions, but when the limits were relaxed, she sought to see as much of Ireland as she could in one weekend. Lockdown restrictions had eased during Tina's stay, but Rosalee had not planned other arrangements for that particular weekend, so having Tina there relieved Rosalee of the pressure of being sociable during her time off. Following the journeys of au pairs and host families and observing participants' everyday routines and how their relationship

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[57] Niamh and Tom conveyed this message to me while Rosalee, their au pair at the time, was not present in the room.

grows or does not grow over time, particularly during Covid-19 in Ireland, gave insights into the establishment or non-formation of familial bonds.

By analysing the experiences of au pairs and host families, I will investigate how connections between au pairs and host families are formed or weakened [58]. In the literature, there is a temporal aspect to these dynamics (Amrith and Coe 2022). As a result, I investigate whether or not kin relationships establish more rapidly or not at all as a function of the temporality of an au pair's stay. Because an au pair appears to have a defined time span, their transition into a family may happen faster than in other 'fictive' relationships, assuming it transpires at all (where specific boundaries are first established). Therefore, I examine what kin means in these situations and ask how do familial relationships develop over time? How do routines in housework and child-care affect these feelings of being part of a family? Also, how does an au pair's time limits affect their connection with a host family or limit their options?

In Chapter One I presented a comprehensive overview of the transformations within the anthropological discourse on kinship. It is crucial for this chapter to delve into the concept of fictive kinship and explore relationships labelled as 'fictive,' 'pseudo,' and 'false kin,' bearing in mind - fictive to whom?

Fictive Kinship? Fictive to whom?

Taking a broad stroke from the literature mentioned in Chapter One, kinship has been characterized by anthropologists as a complex network of social relationships that are based on marriage and birth and are influenced by culture. Because of the emphasis put on significantly varied relatedness norms, social practices become challenging.

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[58] Chapter Seven will examine at what transpires when boundaries are breached.

Additionally, inquiries into virgin births, same-sex partnerships and marriages, new reproductive technologies, adoption, and foster care have given kinship in anthropology a fresh perspective (Shore 1992; Edwards et al. 1999; Franklin & McKinnon 2001; Franklin & Ragone 1998; Strathern 1992; Weston 1991; Howell 2009).

In the late 1950s, Norbeck and Befu's (1958) ethnographic research in Japan explored the terminology of fictive kinship. They note that informal kin terminology is used to demonstrate respect while reflecting and preserving a social structure that prioritizes vertical relationships with related and unrelated persons. More recently Barnard (2006) addresses the concept of fictive kinship, concentrating on non-biological relationships such as godparenthood and compadrazgo. Godparenthood, according to Barnard, is a sort of fictive kinship common in Christian cultures. At baptism, the parents choose a godparent who promises to spiritually care for the child as it grows up. Compadrazgo, on the other hand, is a relationship between a child's godparents and the child's parents. It is widespread in Roman Catholic society, particularly in Latin American and Western Mediterranean countries. According to Barnard (2006:103), the relationship may be unequal because the 'compadres' may provide money and/or aid in times of need and celebrations. In Barnard's (2006) grouping of kinship studies, he divides the subject matter into three sections: kinship terminology, descent theory, and alliance theory. In the section specifically addressing kinship terminology, Barnard establishes a distinction between "real" kinship, which involves a biological connection, and "fictive" kinship, which incorporates non-biological ties (ibid: 103). However, as showed by the above-mentioned literature and discussion of debates in Chapter One, the issue of biological versus fictive kinship is much more intricate and cannot be easily categorized into simple dichotomies of real or fictive.

It is all too easy to characterize nonbiological familial connections as fictive, pseudo, ritual, false kin, quasi or artificial kinship without questioning fictive to who? However, Howell (2003; 2006) outlines how internationally adopted children in Norway are made into Norwegians through a process she labels "kinning" in her anthropological research of adoption. Although "kinning" is an important notion in adoption situations (Alber and Martin 2018), Howell places emphasis on children's absorption into larger kin networks rather than more localized family groupings. According to Howell, the kinning moment occurred when an agency assigned a specific child to a certain couple. This occasion supplied an inception narrative to explain the strong bond between parent and child

> When a child is allocated to a couple, I suggest that the birth may be said to begin. It extends through the time following allocation, arrival, and the initial period after arrival. Upon allocation, expecting parents are sent a photograph of the child and its personal details. From this time onwards, the kinning of the distant and unseen child is actively pursued. The photograph is duplicated and widely distributed, and the child's room made ready.
>
> (Howell 2003: 471)

The quote above bears relevance to the experiences of both au pairs and host families. As previously discussed in prior chapters, various procedures are involved, such as the process of selecting au pairs or host families, the initial arrival and establishment of boundaries, and the preparation of living arrangements, including the au pair's bedroom and the overall home setting. All of these variables play a significant role in shaping the overall experience for both host families and au pairs. Furthermore, they play a significant role in either developing or dissolving kin-like relationships among the persons involved. Similar to this, anthropologist Helena Ragoné (1996) describes how mothers who adopt children born via surrogacy might subsequently assert that the child is theirs because of the mother's desire to have a child; the desire generates

the "kinning." If relationships that develop kin outside of the standard, attributed arrangements of descent and alliances necessitate some method of kinning, Margaret K. Nelson (2020: 24) calls this "like- sibling bonds (as a type of fictive kinship) require some analogous process (creating "like- siblingness") to demonstrate that this relationship has special significance and maybe even is meant to be." As a result, Nelson refers to the types of relationships she analyses in her research as 'fictive' through categorisations rather than a 'kinning' process. Nelson (2020) used the term fictive kin because her informants describe their connection with someone to being 'like' a family member and by employing the concept of what they understand family to be. Nelson's (2020) research focuses on white middle-class people in the United States of America who identify as heterosexual, and she claims that white people intentionally develop meaningful relationships with people who are not family or kin, and that they regard these other people as being of sufficient importance that they think of them as being "like family" (ibid 2020: 4-5). Nelson (2020: 7) indicated that the connections she sought to study were "intentional fictive kinship" ties. That is, such relationships did not evolve by coincidence; rather, they were chosen, and they do not simply exist; rather, they are established and perpetuated via activity. She claims that over time, they may become complicated to the point that they no longer feel voluntary (despite the fact that individuals are plainly free to quit them). They do, however, begin with a choice.

Similarly, in this study, au pairs and host families established kin-like connections over time, and kin terminologies were used to categorize their relationship, such as Violet, who felt "like a mom" and "like a daughter" to her host family. Kinship language was utilized to explain their relationship and how they conduct and understand being like a family member in Ireland. Through interaction, equating an

au pair or host family to being "like a member of the family" engages in the imaginative and creative development of these connections. Pierre Bourdieu (1996:20) states "the family is a principle of construction of social reality". This socially contrasted ideal of how we do family is developed in their mind of what they assume family to be like and what we consider to be normal family behaviour, rhythms, and routines - this is what Bourdieu calls a "nomos" and thus "the family is the product of institutionalization" (ibid: 21). This creation of family produces "obliged affections and affective obligations of family feeling (conjugal love, paternal and maternal love, filial love, brotherly and sisterly love, etc.)" (ibid: 22). For au pairs to be involved in the creation of family they should follow the routines and rhythms of their host family. As a result, being a part of a family includes not only the institutionalisation of familial relationships but also the daily rhythms and routines that go with it. Routines, then, are indications of active engagement and participation within the family unit. Sarah Pink (2004) states that everyday routines in the homes such as cooking or cleaning are not mundane or repetitive activities but are a preformed action. Pink (2004: 10) argues "that everyday practice should be seen not only as engagement with the visual/visible, material/tangible and social aspects of home, but as being integrally related to sensory perception, experience and action". Examining the routines and experiences of au pairs and host families provides a comprehensive insight of the relevance of these activities, which may either develop, weaken or end relationships.

As shown in Chapter Four this can be instructed through a verbalised contract or a carefully written contract that provides a structure /routine for the au pair. By analysing au pairs daily rhythms and routines indicated how they became "like family" or became distant from their host. As Bourdieu's (1977: 34) investigation into the

functions of kinship and the contrasts between "theoretical" and "practical" kin ties continues, it provides important insights into how kinship operates in theoretical conceptualizations as well as everyday practical experiences. Bourdieu observes that genealogists' and anthropologists' kinship charts and diagrams just repeat "the official representation of social structures", rather than genuine connections as they exist in everyday practice. According to Bourdieu, representational kinship is "nothing other than the group's self-representation and the almost theatrical presentation it gives of itself when acting in accordance with that self-image" (ibid: 35). Practical kinship groupings, on the other hand, persist only via ongoing maintenance (social ties, rituals, marriages, family events, communication, and so on). Bourdieu argues that kinship should be viewed as something that individuals actively generate and "with which they do something" (ibid :35), rather than as a fixed, idealistic, organized map of social relations. To summarize, he warns us not to confuse society's blueprint with its actual practical, daily, and very real workings.

Drawing on Bourdieu's research, Amrith and Coe (2022) assert that, within the domain of care work, it is important to additionally examine the complex negotiations surrounding identity during the reproduction of a household. This involves a person being

> socially considered one kind of person (kin) in one moment and another kind (a paid employee) in the next. The malleability between different understandings of kinship allows paid care workers to substitute for adult children, spouses, or parents in doing the most onerous forms of care, without taking their place.

> (ibid: 309)

Amrith and Coe argue that this fluidity involved in domestic work is a key factor that makes the employment of care workers appealing from the employer's perspective.

They explore two different cases studies of African eldercare workers in the United States and aging Asian domestic workers in Singapore. They state that when "material consequences of kinship are at stake" essentialist notions of kinship based on blood and marriage come to the forefront, trumping practical notions of kinship "based on care, love, or closeness" (ibid: 309). However, Amrith and Coe do not disregard practical notions of kinship in domestic work, and they illustrate the very real workings of kinship relations that can happen between employers and domestic workers even if it comes to a difficult ending. Additionally, they do not use the terminology of 'fictive kinship', instead, they demonstrate how factors such as immigration status, retirement, and the death of the employer can underscore the dispensability of domestic workers.

Aligned with Carsten's (2000) concept of 'relatedness', Amrith and Coe (2022: 309) state that kinship can develop gradually through "multiple forms of materiality, and through feeding, co-residence, and adoption, creating a shared habitus and sense of mutual solidarity", without biology and marriage being a central component. This is especially evident during the period of employment for domestic workers and their employers. Nonetheless, Amirth and Coe do not dismiss or deviate from essentialist ideas of kinship. They argue that within the domain of care work- state policies, and the privatized care market endorse essentialist notions of kinship, which becomes particularly evident post the termination of a contract. Likewise, in this study I acknowledge essentialist concepts of kinship concerning the ambiguous distinctions between au pairs being perceived as both a family member and an employee. Simultaneously, in alignment with Carsten and Bourdieu, I recognize that kinship relations can progress and be intentionally cultivated over time (see case studies below).

Drawing from Bourdieu's (1977) and Amrith and Coe's (2022) research, I will demonstrate the very real workings of au pairs' rhythms and routines in their hosts' homes, as well as how everyday activities assist to establish or demolish the idiom of kinship. I'll start with Violet, an au pair who lived and worked with an Irish family before the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions. After doing so I will illustrate Lola and Rosalee's rhythms and routines during Covid-19 lockdowns. Each au pairing example demonstrates varied degrees of Kinship. Kinship can be brief and intense in certain situations, and it can dissolve when the au pair journey is completed (Amrith and Coe 2022). In other cases, regardless of how much work both sides or one side puts in, it may grow gradually or not at all. Finally, I discuss the experiences of host families.

Like a 'real' mom, daughter, sister, or friend.

Violet, a 21 year old au pair from Germany, starts work at 7:45 a.m. She goes downstairs while her "parents" get ready for work. She assists with breakfast for the children but encourages the older daughter (11 years old) to prepare her own lunch box because a16 month old toddler requires more of her attention. The oldest girl does not want Violet in the morning since her "real mom" is around, and she wishes to spend time with her before she departs. She needs to remind the oldest daughter to get ready for school when the 'parents' leave. As the school bus arrives, the oldest daughter departs. Violet must then concentrate on preparing the baby's breakfast. Violet and the young child play at home, and at 10 a.m. she takes the baby outdoors to meet other au pairs, attend playgroups, go to the playground, or go shopping and have coffee. She returns home around 12 p.m. to give the baby a nap. Every Monday, she attends a church-organized play group in Lucan, where she remarks, there are many "grannies" drinking tea or coffee while the children occupy themselves. She

claimed that she felt criticized the first time she visited since some grandmothers commented,

> "You look too young to have a baby." They judge me in silence And I'm not the mom but if I was, why not I'm 21 but most people are really, really proud of me because when they started talking to me, they asked me where you are from, I told them everything and then they said, "wow that's crazy. how are you getting on here? you are acting like her real mom".
>
> (Violet 2020)

Violet smiled as she recalled other people noticing she was acting like a real mom with the baby. I inquired whether she sincerely felt like a real mother to the youngest child. Violet reflected that she feels like a "real mom" to "her" youngest kid (16-month-old girl), but not to the older daughter because they do not spend a lot of time together.

> The 11-year-old helps me a lot, but she is going to school, so I only see her one hour in the morning and two/ three hours in the afternoon but she's doing her homework in the afternoon, so I don't really see her. It's just the baby, and she's sleeping three hours a day, which is perfect. I can have a break.
>
> (Violet 2020)

Violet was proud that she had created a kin-like relationship with the 16-month-old infant, but she also voiced regret that her host mother was not spending as much time with her "own" baby.

> Violet: Kind of sad to see, to be honest. That is like a negative thing, but I am really proud of it, but I spend most time with the kids, obviously. Mom [host] only sees them one hour in the morning and two hours in the evening, the rest I spend with the kids. So, the baby when she's crying, and she's coming down or something she doesn't go to a mommy anymore, she comes to me. And she says mommy to me.
>
> Researcher: Does the mom get upset?
>
> Violet: I think so. She does not say but I think she is, it would hurt me, I always say I am not Mommy, I am Vivi. She is only 16-month-old, so she does not really understand what is going on. The oldest girl wants me to be like her big sister. And when the parents come home, I tell them about my day because I feel bad if I wouldn't tell her anything about it because she would feel like

she's not a part of their lives. That's why I tell her everything - what she ate, slept etc and then I go upstairs. The baby doesn't understand that I'm off. So, she's knocking on my door calling me her mammy. She wants a cuddle. The parents try keep her away from my door but sometimes not possible.

Violet remarked that her host mother is like: "my real mum, she truly is. It will be really difficult to leave the family. I'm usually in tears when we talk about it." Violet mentioned that her host mother was not interested in a new au pair. Violet believes she is being asked to remain forever because she is the family's first au pair. Violet planned to leave her host family in August 2020 as she arrived in August 2019; however, she left in March 2020 due to Covid-19 restrictions. She told me that she was excited to travel around Ireland throughout the summer months, but this was not feasible because of the pandemic lockdowns. She told me that her host mom was crying when she went back to Germany for Christmas in December 2019, and she could not imagine leaving the family forever.

Violets 'like' kinship bond was largely felt by the host mother and the 16-month-old child. She described herself as a close friend to the host father and a sister to the oldest daughter. Violet felt welcomed before arriving at her host family's house since the host mother requested that Violet email some images of herself to put in the living room. She also requested that Violet email images of her bedroom in Germany so that the host mother may similarly arrange her room. Violet's host mother explained to her that she had previously been an au pair and knows what it's like to join a stranger's house, and she wanted to make that transition simpler for Violet. Violet's bedroom door at her host's house eventually became a shrine to the oldest daughter's artwork that she created for her in school.

Although Violet felt like family in her host's home, she was still very much aware that au pairing "is a job" and was mindful that her connection with the children was something that her host parents paid for.

> **Violet:** It is a job, Yeah, it's not really a cultural exchange, because It doesn't really matter where I'm from, because we never really talked about Germany, it's not like it's an exchange. I mean I learn English and I learned about the Irish culture and it's not the other way around. Yeah. And sometimes they ask what Germans think about the Brexit, oh what is, Germany, but it's not. It's more job than anything else. It is a job, but you live with your employers, and that's weird. To be honest, I can't wait to move out. Not because I don't like them just because I want a place of my own independence. I mean I don't have to ask my family if I can go there, and my friends can stay in my room and my sister can stay but it's still not MY house.
>
> **Researcher:** So, you're kind of like walking on eggshells sometimes?
>
> **Violet:** Yes, and I'm 21 SOOO
>
> **Researcher:** can you bring men home?
>
> **Violet:** Yeah, because I met someone and they met him and said you have to introduce him to us because I'm your new mom now ha-ha she [host mother] said, I hope you know I'm not serious but if you want him to can come over for dinner. So, he came over for dinner and he's allowed to stay over. They don't really care what I'm doing. I always let them know what I'm doing. Oh, I'm going to Dublin to meet him and so, and I always tell them who I'm staying with just in case.
>
> **Researcher:** Does your host mom check in on you?
>
> **Violet:** She's really worried about me. She goes, make sure you wear a scarf.
>
> **Researcher:** That's so sweet. What is the guy like that you met?
>
> **Violet:** Yes, his name is Jonny and he's from Sligo. He's working in Dublin. I met him in October. I didn't even tell him that I might stay for college, because I'm scared and he'll put a pressure on me because he will get really excited. I would say that I'm staying here because I'm not sure if I'm going to stay here, I will, I want to but I'm not sure if I can.
>
> **Researcher:** Yeah. Is it a relationship now or is it like casual dating?
>
> **Violet:** I'm not sure. I think relationship, it's great having him. But it's like a great place to go when I don't want to be home, I can just go to his place. The kids really like him because they met him a couple of times when I went outside, and he joined us for a walk and stuff. And she [the 16-month-old child]

loves him. And that's why they would knock on the door all the time and, that's why I go to Dublin, staying in his house.

It should be noted that I have separated Violet's experience from other au pair experiences because she was an au pair before the introduction of Covid-19 restrictions in Ireland and departed shortly after the restrictions were implemented. Violet's case study illustrates how kinship develops over the course of events and experiences at a specific point in one's life. The interaction process began the moment Violet selected her host family. Violet's host mother facilitated the transition by requesting photographs, displaying them in the living room, and decorating Violet's room. This is comparable to Howell's (2003) work on the 'kinning' process in adoption. According to Howell's research, once parents receive photographs of their adopted child, they begin preparing their house and engaged in the kinning process. However, it is crucial to clarify that I am not making a straight comparison between au pairing and adoption because the legal restrictions differ, and au pairing does not have the same implications of 'kinning' as adoption. Furthermore, I am not referring to the au pair experience as 'kinning' since it is more ambiguous, comprising features of both a familial bond and a job. Instead, I want to stress that Violet's host mother began the integration process before Violet arrived in Ireland. [59] As a consequence of being made to feel welcome earlier in her journey, Violet settled quite quickly with this host family and began to feel periods of intense kinship.

According to Miller and Garvey (2022), the significance of kinship can vary over the course of an individual's life, indicating that it is not always a fixed or static concept. It is important to note that while the significance of kinship may fluctuate the

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[59] I have explored au pairs and host families 'first contact' in Chapter Four and Five.

fundamental relationships and roles within kinship remain unchanged. For instance, individuals continue to be mothers or grandmothers, but there may be periods when the demands and intensity of these roles vary. Violet felt a strong sense of kinship throughout her time as an au pair, feeling "like a mom," and "like a daughter" but this strong kinship experience faded over time as she remarked that she "couldn't wait to move out," and this occurred at a time when she had started seeing a new boyfriend in Ireland. Au pairing, in contrast to Miller and Garvey's (2022) study on grandparenting in Ireland, lacks the biological component, and because au pairs are paid to care for someone else's child, the voluntary component may be omitted, and it may become an obligation as "it feels like a job". This was not always the case, and the situation becomes much more challenging when it pertains to au pairs, who blur the boundary between employee and family member. Violet, for instance, thought that au pairing was a job but also actively enjoyed spending time with the youngest child, especially at playgroups where she got to interact with majority of grandparents. For Violet, this was not an obligation but rather something she volunteered to do and found enjoyable. Nonetheless, she found it challenging to refuse their requests during her "spare time" because she shared a home with her employers. For example, when the children came knocking on her door, especially while she was with her boyfriend, because they were also fond of him, Violet was frustrated by this. However, having the flexibility to welcome guests into her bedroom was something that most host families would not allow, with the exception of Tina (see above), demonstrating that boundaries may be bent for au pairs who form kinship-like bonds with families. However, in Chapter Seven, I go into further depth regarding what occurs when boundaries are breached. Violet left this host family when Covid-19 restrictions were implemented in Ireland, and their like-kinship relationship faded for a period of time, but not entirely, since

they remained in touch via online techniques. Violet did, however, return a year later to be a bridesmaid at her host mother and father's wedding.

Covid-19 au pairs

It is essential to depict the daily rhythms and routines of au pairs who worked during the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions since it gives vital insights into their experiences amid specific conditions. We can acquire a better understanding of the influence of Covid-19 on au pairs' work, housing conditions, and interactions with host families by comparing their experiences during the Covid-19 period to those previous to the pandemic. This comparative examination gives insight on the difficulties they encountered, the modifications they made, and the effects of the idiom of cultural exchange. Is spending additional time with their host family helpful in the process of forming a like kinship connection, or does being "trapped" in their host house, with little or no option to "escape" their host family, harm their prospective closeness? I'll start with Lola, who wanted to integrate in with an Irish family, and compare her routine to Rosalee who also initially wanted to be part of an Irish family. Rosalee was an au pair for Niamh and Tom during Covid-19 lockdowns as mentioned above.

Lola, a 28 year old Spanish au pair, gets up at 7 a.m. and prepares for au pair duties. Around 8 a.m., she wakes up Bill, the 10-year-old boy she looks after and gets him ready for school. This entails giving him breakfast and ensuring he is showered and dressed in time for the school bus. Lola then wakes up Emily, a one-year-old baby girl, expressing that this is the most difficult part of her day. Emily wakes up at 9 a.m., and she needs to prepare a bottle of milk before making the infant breakfast at 10 a.m. Lola puts her down for a nap around 11 a.m. and uses this quiet time to perform some

light housekeeping. Lola makes lunch for Emily and herself when she wakes up, and if the weather is pleasant, she goes for a stroll with Emily after lunch. Around 3 p.m., Emily takes another nap until around 5 p.m., during which Lola makes the child's dinner. Her host father comes home from work and prepares dinner for the rest of the family and they all eat together at 6 p.m. She spends her spare time with the family after dinner and at 9 p.m., the host mother and Lola have tea, while Bill has chocolate and toast. Lola retires to her bedroom around 10 p.m. to watch movies on her laptop. Lola receives 100 euro pocket money plus food and accommodation per week and notes that she was happy with the money because she couldn't go anywhere during Covid-19 to spend it. She explains that au pairing wasn't a job for her as she felt like a member of the family and was happy to "take orders" from this family. Lola made it clear that her family did not exploit this kin-like relationship and never asked Lola to do additional work on top of her pre-agreed contract and duties.

As discussed in Chapter Three, most au pairs imagined their experience to part of a cultural exchange and for the majority of my au pair participants this involved exploring Ireland outside their host families' homes. During Covid-19 lockdown this aspect of cultural exchange dissolved and au pairs movements were restricted. However, because Lola arrived during lockdown in both Ireland and Spain, she knew and accepted that this aspect of cultural exchange could not happen and wanted to make the most of her experience with her host family in their home. Lola expressed that her favourite part of the day was having tea with her host mother each evening as over time it moulded into a 'fictive friendship'. As Miller (2017) suggests the concept of 'fictive friendship,' which posits that friendship now serves a role similar to fictive kinship. In other words, people are forming close bonds and interactions resembling those found in family relationships. Interestingly, Lola not only used the language of

friendship but also used terms related to fictive kinship to describe her relationship with her host family. As Carsten (2013:249) argues "idioms of social ties may be mobilized to reduce, replace, or reinforce biological ones—sisters or mothers and daughters may be so close that they are "best friends," but friends, in the absence of kinship ties—or sometimes in contrast to them—can also be "like sisters.""

Notably, au pairs often used the phrase 'like-family' to describe this temporary arrangement. Lola aimed to embody the 'traditional'[60] concept of an au pair by becoming an integral part of the family during her stay. However, after her time as an au pair in Ireland, Lola returned to Spain and struggled to stay in touch with her host family due to her busy schedule. Despite this, she expressed that she frequently thinks about the children, particularly the baby with whom she spent a significant amount of time.

Moving forward, I will delve into Rosalee's case study. Much like Lola, Rosalee's arrival in Ireland coincided with the Covid-19 restrictions, and she was well aware of the limitations on her mobility. However, her experience differed as she faced increased workloads and complex family dynamics, which led to significant tensions arising for Rosalee.

Rosalee is a 27-year-old au pair from France. She gets out of bed at 8am and wakes up the two girls an hour later "because we are in lockdown, and they do not have school". She has breakfast with the girls and helps them get dressed. She expressed that this is a difficult task because they do not want to listen to her and refuse to get dressed. then they brush their teeth and hair. After their morning routine she begins to

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[60] See Chapter One for the 'traditional' definition of au pair.

home school 8-year-old Emma, with 4-year-old Maire sitting next to them playing alone or watching cartoons. At noon she is finished home-schooling, and they have something to eat. Depending on the weather, they might play a game outside, go outside for some fresh air or feed the animals with the eldest son who is 19 years old. Feeding the animals is Rosalee favourite task because it is a reason to go outside with the girls and spend time with them. She was terrified of the animals at first because she saw a cow kick someone before. On the day that I spoke to Rosalee, she told me that she had a picnic outside with the girls and they made apple cake and had orange juice. Then they return inside for dinner. Niamh finishes work at 5.30 or 6pm and when Rosalee sees the host mother returning from her home office, she knows that she can rest. The host father works from home too but does not work in the home office. Instead, he works in the living area and is around if Rosalee needs him, but he switches between inside and outdoors work.

Rosalee works approximately 9 and half hours a day, 5 days a week for which she receives 100 euro a week pocket money plus food and accommodation. During lockdown she worked a total of 45 hours a week and her pocket money of 100 euro didn't increase. Rosalee expressed that it is a very long day of work because the children are at home full time, and she has become their teacher. She observed that Maire gets "pissed off" a lot because she misses her friends, and it is hard for her to deal with Maire's attitude. She is irritated all the time and she watches a lot of television and is clearly bored. Emma was also difficult at the beginning because she tried to test boundaries. One morning Rosalee asked Emma to put on her clothes and she made a whining sound to mimic Rosalee Emma was testing her boundaries to see if Rosalee will put up with this behaviour. "And because we had a great time with the animals yesterday and this morning, I waited by the computer ready to home school

and she came to me and said "I put some clothes on and I brushed my teeth, and everything okay we can begin". Rosalee was pleased at this progress after the children tried to test her boundaries, and now thinks they will begin to have a good relationship going forward.

Rosalee, like Lola, desired to be "like family," but unlike Tina, this did not occur instantaneously. Rosalee offered to keep and share a diary tracking her journey to see whether time helped her bond with the host family.

Rosalee's Journal

8 Feb 2021

> The girls: They are so bored too... It is so hard sometimes for Emma to do her home school. She just does not want to do this, whatever I say me or the father. She is distracted with just little things. Maire misses her friends too and she has lot energy, so she screams all time, she cries all time too for nothing... I lose my patience sometimes; I just want to say STOOOOOP, but they don't care about what I say. I am not a teacher, and even if they want me to be part of the family - I am not, so they don't listen to me. Sometimes I would like the mother and the father to help me to force her to do the home school because I look like the devil for her! The father begins now to say, "home-school now!" but it's rare. The last week we went to the playground, I drive alone with them, and it was a pleasant time, just running and biking. I want more sunny days to do that. They were very excited to know that I can drive alone without the mother cause now we don't need to wait for her to go (because she works every day).

> The habits: I have trouble with the family's habits. For example, when it comes to cleaning, I just feel like I am behind everyone else. When one of the children eats, she leaves everything on the table and usually the mother cleans up behind. I would like the parents to simply say to make an effort to help with the cleaning. I don't know if it's cultural (child thing) or not, but we don't work like that at home. The girls can shout and cry because they cannot find their gloves or their clothes, but they leave everything on the floor, in the living room, in the corridor... And whatever they do, the parents do not say anything, and it is not my role to educate but sometimes it shocks me. All day long I pick things up on the floor and beg them to tidy up, but they do not care so I feel more like a maid than an au pair. But I know it's also due to the situation, so I try to ignore it. And then, they don't make lunch and we eat very few vegetables so I'm totally out of sorts. It is difficult to change your eating habits.

It's not a question of weight, but we eat extremely fatty foods and I feel that my body doesn't like it. I am going to buy vegetables soon so I can at least eat them for lunch.

It is clear from her journal that she is frustrated with the children, their habits, and the food. She expressed she is feeling more like their maid, and they are not respecting her as a family member because they are not listening to some of her requests. Rosalee expressed determination that she wanted to have a kin like connection with her host family and decided to give it more time.

Another month has passed, and Rosalee is beginning to settle in more.

4 Mar 2021

Hi Miriam, how are you? I'm writing to give you news as we said. So compared to last time, I've acclimatised to family life here, it's going much better. The girls are really nicer to me now, and the fact that school has started again has really calmed them down. I've put them to bed a few times, they want me to come and play in their room and wake me up in the morning. We're much closer and it's very nice. It took two months for us to be really comfortable together. I've also managed to find my own routine here; I try to keep up a bit of sport and get out of the house because sometimes the fact that we're all on top of each other becomes a burden. I've had a few differences with the father.... I don't know if it's our behaviour or the fact that we're tired of being at home doing nothing but sometimes we don't get along. I know that there is also the language barrier which sometimes makes dialogue complicated, and I feel sorry for that. Sometimes I see him annoyed that he doesn't understand and that makes me feel bad. However, I have a way out of the house because I know the neighbour who has become a friend of mine and so I go to her house very regularly. I miss my family and friends, but I'm used to it because I used to live in Paris, so it doesn't hurt too much. I really love life on the farm, so I am not homesick at all. I enjoy every moment. Otherwise on Sunday I had the chance to go with the dad to Wicklow National Park which was great. It gave me a glimpse of the possibility of traveling for the rest of the trip and it did me a lot of good. The good weather is starting to come back so it's very good for my morale, I love it. And the days are starting to get longer so the girls and I are playing outside on the terrace and in the garden at the end of the day, it's great. That alone changes the atmosphere for everyone.

Rosalee seems to be becoming more relaxed with the family. She has found a routine and is more comfortable with the children. It is clear that lockdown and being "on top" of the family had become a burden for her. She got a glimpse of the 'outside world' and imagined what au pairing could be like post pandemic. And she started to build a closer bond with the children. However, On the 1st of July, I finally got to meet Rosalee in person when lockdown restrictions eased. I met her in a restaurant in Carlow and we sat outside for some coffee and beers. Rosalee was leaving in a few weeks, so I wanted to see how she was feeling about her experiences at the end of her journey. She seemed more frustrated and anxious than during any of our previous conversations. She was delighted that her journey was coming to an end and felt more like an outsider with her host family than she did at the beginning of her stay. Rosalee claimed that her age had an influence on the problems she had with the host family. She said that because she is 28 years old, she learned how to say no to people and express her feelings "but if I was 21, I would just say yes yes yes". Her host family did not like such exercise of agency and thought it was because she's "French and arrogant".

Rosalee's case study illustrates that not all families and au pairs may cultivate kinship-like interactions, even when both parties are enthusiastic about establishing a familial connection from the outset. In Rosalee's case, she did not seamlessly integrate into the family, yet she did experience brief instances of 'like kinship' with the children during shared activities. When comparing the daily routines of Rosalee and Lola, we can observe striking similarities, except for Lola's additional responsibility of caring for a one-year-old baby, which (like Violet's example) demanded more of her attention. However, because schools were closed during some of Rosalee's stay, she also found herself required to dedicate a much greater portion of her attention to the children.

Lola, in particular, made a conscious decision to immerse herself in her host family's daily life and spend as much time as possible with her host parents to enhance her language skills. In doing so, she formed a deep connection that she described as "like family," especially with the one-year-old baby. This sense of maternal care, involving feeding, clothing, bathing, and putting the baby to sleep, created a familial bond that Lola strongly felt, even if it may not have been reciprocated to the same extent by the baby. A similar sense of "like family" connection was also evident between Lola and the host mother. Both sides eagerly anticipated their nightly teatime discussions, during which they would share their daily experiences. This feeling of familial closeness was voluntarily expressed by both parties, with Lola stating, "she is like my mom, and I am like her daughter." It is worth noting that Lola and I had initially planned to meet in person, but her host mother politely requested that they reschedule our meeting to take place online due to concerns about Covid-19. Lola mentioned that her host mother was genuinely concerned about her well-being, stating, "no, she is always checking in on me to make sure I am okay." Although this "like family" connection was temporary in both Lola's and her host family's lives, it was very real during that period. It is important to recognize that just as friendships can come and go, the bond that existed during that time remains significant. This perspective aligns with Carsten's (2000) notion of relatedness, which goes beyond traditional ideas of blood ties and emphasizes the creation of diffuse relationships. It suggests that family ties are not preordained but rather something people construct. The home serves as a central place for nurturing these family bonds, with kinship often emerging through "the intimate sharing of space, food, and nurturance that goes on within domestic space" (Carsten, 2004, 35).

However, kinship is not always harmonious and joyous. Kinship may be challenging at times and can test many boundaries. Kinship has the ability to reveal gender dynamics and disparities. The importance of the home as a site of shifting power relations between men and women and between parents and children has been emphasized by feminist geographers (Gregson and Lowe 1995; Domosh 1998; Holloway and Valentine 2001). Carsten (2013: 247) argues that "Differentiation, hierarchy, exclusion, and abuse are, however, also part of what kinship does or enables—in Euro-American contexts and elsewhere". Sahlins (2013) persuasively illustrates kinship's inclusionary traits, its virtually unlimited functioning to contour, making an appearance in different forms with varying results: food, dwellings, property, reproduction, cognition, feelings, and experience can be readily covered by the concept "mutuality of being". Nonetheless, "mutality of being" has a positive aspect to it, since it overlooks the reality that kinship may have moments of "thinning," which means that kinship can thin down at different phases of one's life or via experiences (Carsten 2013: 248). Carsten uses the word "thinning" to describe the impact of marriage or leaving the place of birth, which may result in a weakening but not necessarily a complete severing of birth links. This impact may be amplified if distances are large, and visits are infrequent. However, Carsten points out that these are complicated issues, and moving away may also strengthen nostalgic bonds of memory to a natal home. Casten states the importance of temporality and not just in relation to a remembered past. She provides an example from her research of reunions between adult adoptees and their birth kin and was fascinated by the avenues of communication. Carsten (2013: 248) stated that Christmas cards "left small openings for the potential reestablishment or strengthening of bonds in the future when they

seemed unable to proceed in the present—too heavily encumbered by the weight of the past".

However, due to the temporary nature of the au pairs stay, this like kinship bond may thin out or disappear when an au pair leaves their host family home and if the host family get a new au pair. Returning to the vignette at the beginning of this chapter, Tina's like kin bond with her host family may have thinned for a brief period when she moved to a new host family in Kerry but she remained in frequent contact with Niamh and Tom and visited some weekends. Their mutual feeling of like kin required effort from both parties to maintain their relationship.

On the contrary, unlike Lola and her host family, who allowed their relationship to wane as a result of the geographical distance and did not invest effort in maintaining further communication. As Carsten (2013) notes, the concept of temporality provides us with the opportunity to investigate the various stages and buildups of kinship connections, as well as the moments of disruption and dissolution within these relationships. Carsten argues the notion of temporality provides us with the potential to examine how kinship relationships develop and intensify over time, as well as how they can experience fractures and disintegration. Carsten illustrated this by providing examples from Southeast Asia and other regions, where the significance of kinship often emerges from the gradual accumulation of shared everyday experiences that occur when individuals live together. These experiences encompass both ritualistic and non-ritualistic moments and contribute to the unique strength and significance of kinship bonds. Rosalee, for example, felt like family during periods of her stay, and this coincided with the relaxation of Covid-19 lockdown limitations, allowing her to spend some time outside her host family's house and "take a breather" from the host

family. When social and cultural differences became apparent, she experienced extreme irritation and a sense of being "not a family member" with her host family.

Conclusion:

Using fictive kinship terminology is just trying to avoid saying that 'family' can change a lot and some family members are transient. For fictive/pseudo/false kin to be real, it means the idea of 'family' is fixed. That there's such a thing as 'real' family. When really 'family' is a process that is created and practiced.

Kinship can be subjective or, more specifically, that concepts like 'fictive kinship' (Norbeck and Befu 1958), 'pseudo family' (Búriková and Miller 2010), and 'false kin relations' (Cox and Narula 2003), can be subjective (Nelson 2020). Teasing out these relationships entails relying on my participants' use of language while describing their interactions and routines to characterize their connection and their experiences as 'a member of the family' or 'employee'. Like the case study above, Niamh, Tom, and Tina (mutually felt and behaved 'like family'), had like-familial relationships, but this type of familial intimacy was not shared with Rosalee or other au pairs in their household. Kinship ties can evolve over time, and feeling like a mother, daughter, sister, or friend may not happen instantly or at all. They may mutually dislike each other, or they might be kin-like initially then quickly become not-kin like. Additionally, relationships can thin down at different phases of one's life or via experiences (Carsten 2013). Kinship can also be "crafted out of a tension between being and doing, essence and process, fixity and fluidity" (Amrith and Coe 2022: 309).

Nonetheless, according to Amrith and Coe (2022), given the flexible register of domestic work- that navigates between the ambiguous 'imagined'[61] expectations of

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[61] Refer to Chapter Three.

being a family member and/or an employee, care workers can be regarded as both disposable kin and expendable employees. Nevertheless, it is imperative not to disregard the 'practical' dimensions of kinship, as illustrated in this chapter, where the formation and upkeep of kinship bonds are evident.

The theme of ruptures and negotiations will form the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Seven: Ruptures and Negotiations

> I put a kettle, a toaster, and a fridge in their bedroom. I have learned the hard way that breakfast with my boys is really important. They want to have breakfast with me and if someone else is there everything changes. If I want to raise my voice or reprimand them, my behaviour changes if someone else is there. I can't be myself and I want my private time. So, for me if the au pair had their toast or tea in their room and then went to school, they come just come home and work. When we got our first au pair, we wanted someone to be part of the family but by the third we learned what we really wanted. Our third au pair was Brazilian and when she finished work, she went to her room, and this was wonderful, and she was so professional. It really worked and I didn't need to invest my time in someone else after work.
>
> (Macy, Host Mother, 2020)

This vignette captures the essence of this chapter. It depicts the process of becoming an 'experienced host family.' I define 'experienced host families' as those that have had more than two au pairs for a minimum of three to six months each. After encroachments on her personal and spatial boundaries during breakfast time, Macy sought to implement additional boundaries with her au pairs even though this is contrary to the spirit of au pairs joining the family. For Macy's family, the location of cooking appliances in the au pair's bedroom nonverbally creates spatial limits for mealtimes, particularly breakfast time. On the other hand, Macy mentioned that the au pair is welcome to dine with them for dinner at six or seven o clock in the evening. As a result, personal and spatial boundaries are fluid in respect to time. For Macy, boundaries had to be implemented during breakfast time. For other host families, it is the entering of the host parents' bedroom. The au pair may be allowed to enter their bedroom for cleaning purposes during the day, but at 'bedtime,' it can be considered a breach of boundaries. The purposeful selection of appliances (toaster, mini fridge, and kettle) indicates that not all meals can be prepared in the bedroom. There is only

so much you can eat or cook with a toaster, mini fridge, and kettle. The addition of a one ring electric hot plate would signal or allude to further boundaries for an au pair.

This chapter examines the maintenance of boundaries inside the household, from the perspective of au pairs and their host families. These boundaries include a wide range of sociocultural practices. I will specifically examine the placement of the au pair's allocated private space within the broader home. The objective is to emphasize the importance of violated boundaries in identifying and comprehending the set boundaries. While attempts may have been taken during the interview stage to create clear expectations, it is difficult to determine boundaries until they are breached by au pairs and/or host families. This premise is comparable to Mary Douglas' (1966) argument that flaws in a system may draw attention to them. When a rupture occurs, it indicates the establishment of boundaries, and if the breach is addressed, it becomes crucial for the continuance of a successful professional or familial relationship. How are boundaries maintained? I purposefully use the term 'maintained' here since I examined the formation and negotiation of boundaries in chapters 4 and 5. 'Maintained' refers to continuing practices to preserve expected, agreed, or practiced boundaries. Or, in certain cases, the removal of established boundaries as the relationship evolves. Boundaries can be maintained for some host families through a detailed written contact and written guidelines for au pairs to follow (see example below), or it is expressed verbally through subtle or non-subtle indications regarding their position in the home. For others, it is through the material objects placed in the au pairs bedrooms which mark a separation or difference from other rooms and can be an indication that their presence in other spaces in the home is not welcomed. Examples of this are the placement of a mini fridge, kettle and toaster in their bedroom or the presence of a television. Some host families may not intend to upset the au pair,

they may do it as a gesture of respect for the au pair's private time. For the au pair it can feel like they have received the "hint" that they are not welcome to participate in family activities nor the freedom to use the family kitchen or television. For some host families and au pairs, the concept of boundaries is not easily defined, or the acknowledgment of their own boundaries are not understood until they have been breached. Additionally, I will explore the intersection between boundaries and the concept of visibility, which pertains to the degree to which au pairs and host families are observed and recognized. I will particularly draw on Búriková's (2020) research, which explores how the visible presence or absence of au pairs within a particular space (public or private) effects their social recognition and agency.

Maintaining and Breaching Boundaries

In chapters 4 and 5 of this research, I looked at scholarly literature on the notion of boundary-work and how it pertains to au pairing and hosting. The concept of boundary-work was useful in understanding the formation of boundaries during the early phases of au pairing and hosting. In this part, I will give an overview of pertinent anthropological research that has aided my understanding of how boundaries develop, are maintained, and breached in certain circumstances.

As we saw in Chapter Five, Fredrick Barth made substantial contributions to the knowledge of anthropological boundaries. Barth's research was crucial in establishing boundaries as a primary focus in anthropological study (Donnan and Wilson 1999). Barth (1969) addresses social and symbolic boundaries by examining the interactions between various cultural groupings. He contends that ethnic groups are socially constructed formations, and they are not fixed, they are made up of individuals who intentionally modify their cultural identities based on the circumstances in which

they find themselves. According to Barth, people have the capacity to transcend social boundaries if they find doing so personally alluring and they may additionally maintain continuous interactions. He stresses, that such actions do not jeopardize the strength and integrity of the boundaries themselves. The importance of cultural symbols and distinctions stems from their efficacy as organizing instruments for conveying social interactions. The emphasis of Barth's viewpoint is on the fluidity of boundaries and how they relate to interpersonal relationships and cultural identities. His observations provided insight into the importance of boundaries as organizational instruments for social connections inside and across ethnic groupings. Hence, the presence of a boundary is the key factor that sets ethnic groups apart. This boundary plays a pivotal role in helping these groups establish and maintain their identities.

Similarly, Cohen (1994) argues that the idea of ethnicity is malleable, particularly when two ethnic groups interact with one another. The contact between these groups, according to Cohen, might result in an adaptation or adjustment of their individual identities. In these situations, the boundaries between ethnic identities are less rigid, allowing for the acquisition or assimilation of traits from the other group. This implies that ethnicity is fluid and culpable to change in response to intergroup interactions. Within these intergroup interactions, Barth (1969) disputes the idea that ethnic groups may be characterized only by objectively observed cultural traits. During contacts with other ethnic groups, Barth claims people choose to selectively stress some cultural traits while ignoring others, and these decisions are not always predictable. As a result, Barth recommends observing ethnic groups as categories in which participation is established by both self-perception and attribution by others. Ethnic identity, in other words, is a dynamic and negotiated process driven by individual action and social recognition. From this perspective, Donnan and Wilson (1999:21) pose the following

questions: "how and why are such boundaries maintained in the face of personnel flows and systematic relations across them? What sorts of rules structure behaviour at and across boundaries in such a way as to allow those boundaries to endure?". Therefore, by understanding these questions, one would wonder whether boundaries are still significant given how frequently individuals cross them and interact with members of other groups. Should boundaries not disintegrate or become obsolete as a result of people's constant mobility and interaction? Given the importance of boundaries, it is critical to investigate the management of rules and principles that govern interactions and behaviours inside spaces. It is also important to explore how these rules and principles contribute to the long-term stability and continuity of boundaries. While Barth initially argued that ethnic boundaries may be crossed without compromising their existence, this perspective might not hold true when considering au pairs who occupy the space of a different cultural group. Boundaries can be readily threatened and more visible in the context of au pairing, which makes them more noticeable and easier to identify.

According to Wallman (1978), it is critical to appreciate that social boundaries arise as a result of one system reacting to another. As a result, boundaries have a fundamental oppositional character, having two distinct sides or attributes. Wallman claims that boundaries have two different meanings. The first is the structural or organizational, in which a social boundary marks the boundaries of a social system and acts as a connector between it and the systems around it. This interface connects two systems of structure, meaning, or action. In contrast to Barth (1969) and Cohen (1994), Douglas (1992) points out, it frequently consists of uncertainty and possible risks. Social boundaries are important for the people who live inside these systems, too. A boundary's second meaning has to do with how it separates members from non-

members and establishes a foundation for their identification. In other words, boundaries help distinguish between insiders and outsiders by designating who is included and who is excluded inside a social structure (Donnan and Wilson 1999). The host families' home serves as a social system in this research, and the boundary is the physical space (also non-physical rules and regulations are boundaries) within the home that represents the structural and organizational significance of boundaries. It establishes the au pair's private area (usually their bedroom) inside the wider household, indicating the interface between common living spaces and the au pair's personal space. Additionally, boundaries are vital for both the au pair and the host family since they define expectations, norms, roles, and how both parties interact with each other, therefore shaping their relationship.

Similar to boundaries, Deleuze and Guattari (1983) contend that life itself may be viewed as a machine or infrastructure that operates only when it goes through breakdowns, and these breakdowns happen continually. Therefore, life is a cycle of breakdowns. However, rather than taking this point as established by philosophical decree, it can be used to sharpen attention on the empirically variable ways in which breaches in boundaries can break down relationships sometimes and reorganise, reconstruct, or repair relationships at other times. Relationships can develop and reform through these ruptures, if we consider memory, habit, enculturation, teaching and learning as integral to the process. Thus, creating an understanding of their boundaries within the domestic sphere and rectifying their contracts, rules, and bedrooms for the subsequent au pair that will be employed (see an amended contract below). It is important to bring out this element of fluidity because there are some fixed spaces as private (bedrooms), but others change along the public-private spectrum depending on the time of day and the relationship. In this context, the focus

is directed towards ethnic boundaries within households, extending beyond that to encompass the dynamics of public and private boundaries within the household, rather than solely differentiating between interior and exterior spaces.

Public and Private boundaries

Academic literature on the spatial restrictions experienced by au pairs is limited. Though, Cox and Narula (2003) pay particular attention to rules designed by the au pair's host family to safeguard valuable items, limit the number of outsiders that enter the residence, or restrict mealtimes. They claim that the regulations are imposed by the employers (the host family), resulting in an unequal balance of power. However, by establishing these standards for au pairs, host families are able to balance and manage relationships that are acceptable for them but may not seem reasonable to their adult au pair. The house is a private space with familial relations, and comparable restrictions may be applied to children (ibid,2003).

I argue that social boundaries within the home are difficult to define and negotiate. However, I illustrate that when a boundary has been breached, it can be identified, and in some cases, amended. When I refer to public space of the home, I am indicating any other room in the house outside the au pair's bedroom (including parents' bedroom). In addition to boundaries defined by space, they are also defined temporally, It should be noted here that rooms can fluctuate between the public and private realm depending on time. Twigg (1999) argues that different rooms and borders of the house could have permeable labelling as public and private. Twigg's (1999) study focused on in-home care for older and disabled adults. Care professionals have the ability to visit areas that other guests might deem private, thereby turning a private place into a public one. This could include accompanying the homeowner to rooms such as a bedroom or toilet. As

stated in the introduction of this thesis, au pairs' employment falls within the categories of domestic and care work, although their privacy is confined to their bedroom (and bathroom if an ensuite is provided) due to their live-in status. As a result, different areas of the house become the public domain (See Búriková's (2020) analyses of the public versus private realm below).

Garvey (2005: 158) notes that household boundaries are negotiated in light of frequently conflicting expectations of domestic life, with characteristics such as "privacy, visibility, isolation, and access" receiving varying importance. Garvey conducted a comparative study between diverse immigrant and non-immigrant window displays in Skien, south-east Norway. A window demonstrates the connection or overlapping of public and private domestic boundaries and whether the social gaze is welcomed or not. It is precisely through uncurtained windows and window decorations that the social audience may enter the private sphere. Visual access is permitted or welcomed and yet general discourse seems to agree that Norway is one of the most private societies in the world. There is a societal awareness that glancing through one's window is socially unacceptable, but it is impossible to control a fleeting glance. This visual access into the private sphere is what heightens awareness of shifting and sometimes paradoxical household boundaries. Similarly, privacy is something that is preserved in diverse ways. It may have defined bounds but is frequently only acknowledged after it is invaded and in the Norwegian example, it is inherently contradictory. Norwegian homes have reputations for being very private, but privacy isn't contravened by visibility (Garvey 2005).

Bech-Danielsen and Stender (2022) analyse the home from the perspective of architectural anthropology. They argue that the home should not be considered in

isolation to society (public realm). "Home is to be understood as a personal relation between house and residents, and it has to do with emotions and feelings that occur when the residents become attached to the place in which they live. The residents develop their home, while at the same time the home shapes them" (Bech-Danielsen and Stender 2022:31). Nevertheless, Bech-Danielsen and Stender discuss the concept of homemaking through emotional means, a departure from the considerations of physical and temporal boundaries and the question of visibility. However, In the case of au pairs, this personal relationship between them and their hosts' home can become detached despite their bedroom being designated as their private space, it may be invaded by the host family, it may contain the belongings of previous au pairs, or it may simply be void of personal belongings.

Spaces within the home can feel both public and private at the same time. The configuration of the furniture in the au pair's bedroom, according to Búriková (2006), can significantly affect how they feel about their time in the host home as a whole. The au pair may not experience a sense of ownership or belonging in their own room if there are no shelves to display personal items, no storage spaces to arrange clothing, and no freedom to hang pictures even with 'blu tack'. Since there is no designated space for them to find comfort or a sense of belonging, this circumstance may therefore cause feelings of uneasiness, restlessness, or even rejection Búriková (2006) (Refer to the case studies below for additional discussion on this).

Returning to the topic of space within the home, it is important to note that the utilization of space within a household can significantly influence the physical comfort of both au pairs and their host families. It can also have an impact on the au pair and host family relationship as it can be used to negotiate boundaries within the home. Cox

and Narula (2003) state that practices controlling the use of rooms in a house reveal some of the difficulties of incorporating an 'outsider' into the family unit. They mention that the majority of their participants did not frequently spend their 'free time' in the public spaces of the home. Cox and Narula's (2003) findings indicated that the control of spaces in the home is placed into the hands of the host family from their incorporation of rules about rooms, guests, and food. In the aforementioned vignette, Macy employed her position of authority to set social boundaries with subsequent au pairs by placing kitchen appliances in the au pair's bedroom. As Walman (1978:205) states that "a social boundary is symbolic, although it may of course be symbolised by real things". The placement of material objects in the au pairs bedroom symbolises spatial boundaries between the au pair and the host family.

For the majority of au pair participants, their clearest physical border was their bedrooms in the host families' homes. Their bedroom was their private space, and this became especially evident during Covid-19 lockdowns as the public realm (cities and towns) was inaccessible. Therefore, privacy in their rooms was particularly important for au pairs and intrusion on such a space became problematic. On the other hand, for host families, encroachment on 'their' public space was also problematic. However, rectifying intrusions of boundaries was an easier task to handle and or negotiate by the host families than it was for au pairs. As Stubberud (2015:127) states "the boundary between the au pair and the host family became visible as the au pair was seen to stretch beyond her 'mandate'".

For host families, particularly the experienced host families (employers of more than two au pairs), this rupture of boundaries could be rectified with their au pair or if they choose to hire another (a second or a replacement) au pair. According to Búriková and

Miller (2010), the number of au pairs employed by a family has a significant effect on how they are treated. Host families may treat their first and second au pairs differently than they do if they have several au pairs. This multiplicity in treatments adds to the wide range of experiences described by au pairs and host families. When families are new to hosting an au pair, they tend to be more sensitive and compassionate to the needs and overall experience of the au pair. Families who have hosted several au pairs, on the other hand, may pay less attention to these details. Similarly, experienced au pairs may prefer more autonomy, whilst first time au pairs may seek support and absorption into their host family. This, however, is not applicable for all host families and au pairs. As stated in Chapter Three, Mary did not want to treat her first au pair like a member of the family but felt obligated to do so due to the expectations projected by online au pair agencies. Similarly, not all first-time au pairs entered with expectations of wanting to be absorbed into a family. Macy is an example of a host mother who treated her first au pair differently because she believed it aligned with the notion of au pairing, and this altered over time when additional au pairs were employed.

Case study: Macy

On the third of March 2020 I went to the home of host mother Macy, which is situated in a coastal town in the east of Ireland. Macy is in her late thirties. Her nuclear family unit consists of herself, her husband and their two sons aged three and six. She has had three au pairs and is in the process of employing a new au pair. She lives in a gated housing estate that is classified as an affluent area.[62] When I arrived at her estate, I had to wait at the entrance gate to be buzzed in. Macy was waiting in her driveway for me

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[62] Coastal towns in the east of Ireland are popular areas for au pairing and the demand is plentiful.

and waved as I parked outside her house. I felt slightly intimidated as my 15-year-old 'banger' car could not be measured up to the new BMW's or Mercedes-Benz that were parked outside her neighbours' houses. [63] As I walked into her beautifully decorated hallway, it was hard to ignore the size of her 5-bedroom home. I entered her beautifully painted blue kitchen with a counter-island erected in the centre of the room surrounded by spacious floor space. I complimented her kitchen and she quickly responded "oh thank you but it definitely needs to be repainted. I think blue is outdated". We sat down and chatted whilst her two children played around us. I am not mentioning the size and appearance of her home merely out of admiration instead I am trying to illustrate the space in which the au pair and her family inhabits. This will become clear throughout this chapter, as I will try to examine the importance of designated spaces for au pairs and their host families and how boundaries are identified through breaches and in some cases rectified in the home. The most important space in the house for the au pairs is their bedroom especially during Covid-19 lockdowns.

Macy didn't want to show me the au pairs bedroom but assured me that it was very spacious "like a hotel room" and all her au pairs were extremely pleased with their room. She stated that she had learned so much about boundaries from her experience with her first and second au pair. When Macy first decided to host an au pair, she imagined that an au pair would be an additional member to her family (see Chapter Three). [64] But one day when she came home early from work her son at the time was only a "baby" and the au pair was "alone with him in my room cuddling him, I thought this was so inappropriate. I told her I didn't want her in my room". I asked Macy would

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[63] Banger is an Irish slang word for an old rustic car.

[64] I am intentionally using the word 'host' instead of employer here because Macy imagined that her first au pair would instantly become a family member. After her first au pair I will use the words 'employ'; 'employee' and 'employer' as this is a more accurate reflection of their relationship.

she be annoyed if the au pair was in the living room or kitchen cuddling the child. She said, "no because it's like she's hiding up there". I found this particularly interesting because intimacy with her baby was not the problem, the problem was the location where the intimacy occurred.

While Macy said she was glad to see that au pair leave because she crossed some boundaries in her home, she also stated, "but she wasn't a bad au pair". Macy repeatedly spoke about the importance of breakfast time with her children and before having au pairs she didn't realize how important this time was. Macy stated that having a 'stranger' present created a different breakfast time dynamic. Macy needed space from her au pair in order to enjoy some 'family time' in the morning and also when she returned from work. She didn't want to exert her energy into the au pair, instead she wanted to use this energy for her 'family'. Macy has gained experience from her previous au pairs and has decided to change their bedroom to a bedsit to create clearer boundaries about when and where the au pair is welcome in the home. Including the au pair in the home as a family member is in keeping with the purpose of au pairship as a cultural exchange. However, she realised that what she wanted was an employee and she understood that boundaries needed to be incorporated in her home to create a professional divide. For Macy this was done non-verbally by making slight alterations and additions to the au pair's bedroom and ultimately transforming it to a bedsit, creating a clear divide between family and employee.

Bedroom

Zuzanna Búriková (2006) conducted ethnographic research on Slovak au pairs in London during 2004 and 2005. Her ethnographic article 'The Embarrassment of Co-Presence: Au Pairs and Their Rooms' looks at an au pair's room and how it can be

mistreated as a semi-public space by the host family. She gives particular attention to ambivalence in au pair's relationships to their rooms. This may include how the room is ornamented by IKEA furniture that represents the temporary position of an au pair in a household; the invasion of children during their free time; and the room being used as temporary storage by the host family and in some cases with gifts from previous au pairs. However, the au pair may find themselves torn between settling into the family and at the same time understanding their transient position therefore, making their presence in their room invisible (Búriková 2006; Búriková and Miller 2010). Búriková (2006) argues that this can be achieved by not decorating their space with personal objects and / or keeping their rooms particularly clean as if it was not lived in. In contrast, some au pairs leave their rooms dirty as a subtle act of resistance. This act of resistance gives au pairs control over one aspect of the home if they have to clean other family rooms in the house. "One response is simply to see their room as a place of mess, in opposition to their role as cleaner in the rest of the house (ibid 2006: 110). Ironically, part of an au pair's role is to remove dirt from the house so one would assume they should not be symbolically viewed as dirty or consider themselves to be dirty. Some au pairs, on the other hand, may perceive their presence in the house as a kind of dirt. Douglas (1966) established in Purity and Danger that the concept of dirt is linked to larger symbolic concepts of 'purity'. It is a result of systematic classification and ordering of matter, and it denotes unsuitable elements and ambiguous items that do not fit into certain classification systems (Douglas 1966). Au pairs are a great example of such ambiguity because they do not fit neatly into many categorizations, challenging perceptions of generosity, paid labour, family privacy, and kinship all at the same time. This can be seen in Caroline's case study later in this chapter. Caroline felt like a cleaner rather than an au pair and when she became visible

to the host mother, cleaning demands were made of her. As a result, Caroline retreated to her room and became invisible. Caroline was viewed as a 'dirt' remover but felt 'dirty' as a result.

Visibility and Boundaries

I argue that boundaries and visibility are inextricably linked. Búriková (2020: 3) asserts that there is a "multidimensional interconnectedness between the empowerment and disempowerment of paid domestic workers, the visibility of these workers, and the public space of a city". Inspired by De Certeau (1984), Búriková (2020), proposes that people with less authority use diverse techniques and methods to challenge hegemonic ideologies. In the case of au pairs, these strategies include common activities like walking and shopping in cities, allowing them to avoid disciplinary measures at their hosts' homes. Women working in global cities are empowered by their visibility in public settings, but their empowerment is diminished when they are hidden within the seclusion of their host's house. Violet, one of my research participants, exemplifies this dynamic.

On Sunday, February 9th, 2020, just a few weeks before the first pandemic lockdown in Ireland, I met Violet, a 21-year-old au pair from Germany. We spent her day off window shopping and talking in a shopping mall in suburban Dublin. Violet shared that it was hard living under the same roof as her employers. She remarked that she liked to go outside as much as possible during the week and at the weekends when she was "off work" she liked to leave the house, so she could stop "feeling like a second mom" and be "off from the family".[65] She claims that if you have a nine to five job

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[65] She Chapter Six for analysis on kinship relationships.

you "can close the door behind you and I don't have that". Before lockdown, Violet was able to separate her 'work' and 'family' life from her personal and social life and because she had established boundaries with her host family.

> Violet: That's why I try to spend time away from my house. Even though I really like my room I can't really stay there. The room is nice, big and I have my own bathroom Yeah, it is a big house, it's a house. It's crazy when I was like, I'm living here, everybody else is coming over to my house. That is your house. Yeah, and I didn't know before that I arrived that it was going to be so big, But I think it's the Granny's house so I think otherwise they couldn't afford it either. but it's a five-bedroom house.

Violet shares her appreciation for "her" spacious home and her admiration towards her bedroom. She does, however, highlight the need of taking time "off-off" from her host family. She realized the need for establishing a boundary between herself and the host family during her free time as an au pair prior to the pandemic. Despite having a positive relationship with the family, which fluctuated at times and resembled kinship, and living in a spacious dwelling, she nevertheless felt "suffocated" at times and sought an outlet to "escape" from her employers.

Violet's experiences pre-date the pandemic, as she had the option to "escape" her host family every evening or at the weekends, but au pairs during the pandemic only had the option of a walk, run, jog, or drive two kilometres (it later increased to five kilometres) from their host family's home. Au pairs did not have the option to socialise outside their 'household'. Even if they decided to 'bend the rules', there were very few meeting place options, and their host families may have discouraged it. In some cases, their room became their place of socialisation and privacy. Before lockdown, many au pairs actively sought sociality outside their homes during their free time to impose boundaries from the families they serve. Búriková (2020) states that some au pairs wanted clear boundaries to separate home from work, calling it 'switch off time'. After lockdown, they were unable to leave their employers and household due to

governmental and state restrictions on personal mobility. "Albeit informal, the wages of female workers may alter gender hierarchies, and global cities provide space for informal political actions that are visible on their streets" (Sassen 2007 in Búriková 2020:4).

Búriková investigates the relationship between visibility, invisibility, empowerment, and disempowerment in the context of paid domestic labour. She contends that in order for au pairs to feel empowered, this may include visibility in the public realm. However, during the Covid-19 pandemic, this visibility was reduced, resulting in a loss of power for au pairs. As a result, several au pairs modified their visibility inside their host family's home (see Caroline's case study below)

Brighenti (2007) discusses the dual nature of visibility. It can lead to acceptance and recognition on the one hand, but it can also act as a control mechanism, as stated by Foucault (1999). Being continually seen rather than being the one being observed might limit one's ability to feel empowered. According to Búriková (2020), host families may continually control and monitor au pairs and their work, encouraging some au pairs to exploit their visibility as a method of empowerment. However, excessive visibility, referred to as "super-visibility," inside particular social groupings might result in marginalization rather than empowerment (Brighenti 2007). Brighenti (2007) develops the idea of "super-visibility," which refers to migrants or refugees who have restricted media coverage. This increased visibility can have both a controlling and negative consequence. The majority of my au pair participants wanted less visibility rather than greater exposure in order to avoid being examined and disciplined by host families or to preserve visibility within parameters that favour acknowledgment rather than exclusion.

This describes the complications at the intersection of visibility and boundaries. Depending on the social and power dynamics at play, being visible may both empower and disempower. Recognition may result from being seen in the public domain, but it may also be utilized as a tool of control. The notion of "super-visibility" bears paralyzing effects and this may happen when boundaries are pushed beyond their limits. Like a boundary, visibility may be altered and regulated, and when it is crossed, it becomes identifiable. This can be seen in the following case study of Caroline.

Case study 2: Caroline

Caroline is a 28 year old psychologist from Chile who came to Ireland as an au pair to improve her English for her career back in Chile. I spoke to Caroline online through video chat on the 16th of March 2020. She was in her bedroom at her host family's home, there were clothes scattered across her bed and floor. She chatted to me whilst running around, picking them up and putting them into her suitcase, as she was getting a flight the following morning back home to Chile. She looked frustrated and frazzled, so I asked her "Is everything ok? Are you not excited to go back home?" She started crying and whispering to me because she did not want her host family to hear our conversation. Even though Caroline was in 'her' bedroom she felt that her privacy was restricted, and this affected her ability to speak freely about her situation. Caroline noted that she never felt like "part of the family" and 'her' room never felt like 'hers', she was "just a guest in their house". On the one hand, her privacy was still restricted even in her bedroom, but on the other hand, it was a place where she could vanish and be invisible. She expressed that she did not want to leave her bedroom during her "off time" because if her host mother saw her, she would request her to do some chores.

Caroline's experience has been one of extreme "super-visibility," which has prevented her from forming a relationship with her host family. Her time as an au pair ended prematurely, and because of the encroachments on her spatial and personal boundaries, she was able to establish and articulate what she wanted her experience to be like.

> Caroline: I am psychologist and I have a lot of experience with children and play with the children. I like to get to know children. But here I need all the time to clean the house, clean the floor, clean up the clothes, or all the house and I don't have time for a stay with the children. This is not an au pair.

According to Cox and Narula (2010:339) "rules and practices within the home appear to work to distance au pairs from their employers, emphasising the contractual nature of their relationship, even though such rules are contrary to the scheme's guidance". Caroline expressed this conflict as every time the host mother sees her in the house, she asks her to perform household chores, so Caroline spent most of her time in her room on her computer. She removed herself from the controlling and visible lens of her host mother and hid in her room or left the house (before lockdown was enacted). Caroline recalled one weekend when she left the house to spend time with other au pairs. When she returned, the host mother asked, "where were you?" and Caroline replied that she was spending time with other au pairs. The host mother responded, "We are having dinner now, just the family". Caroline went to her room because she wasn't invited to dinner, and she did not eat that night. It could be argued that the host mother was punishing her for arriving back too late for mealtime, similar to how one would discipline a child for misbehaving. On the other hand, the host mother may not

have wanted Caroline to join the family meal because they do not view her as an equal member of the family or wished to established distance.

To contrast with Caroline's experience, we revisit the household of Niamh and Tom (host family) to show that when the au pair has "super-visibility" in the home, it can also have a negative effect on the host family. As a result, the hosts can feel like "a stranger" in their home. The inability to navigate these boundaries ultimately resulted in the au pair's exclusion and termination. It did, however, result in the identification of personal and spatial boundaries as well as the modification of au pair obligations and contracts.

Niamh and Tom

As we explored in previous chapters, Niamh and Tom are a host family from southeast rural Ireland. Niamh is 35 years old and works in the environmental sector, while Tom, in his mid-forties, works on a farm. They have been key participants during my fieldwork from January 2020 to November 2021. I have interviewed and carried out participant observations with five of their au pairs. They have had 10 au pairs in total, some have "become part of the family and some did not fit in". Their nuclear family unit includes two parents (Niamh and Tom), two daughters (five and eight years old) and one 19-year-old son. They have a large two-story house in the countryside with 5 bedrooms (including the au pair's room). The au pair's bedroom is the only room on the ground floor and sits adjacent to the kitchen. The room is separated from the kitchen by doors and a narrow hallway.

On the 13th of November 2021, I went to visit Niamh and Tom because lockdown restrictions had eased. Niamh messaged me on Facebook messenger two nights prior to my visit to inform me that she had just "sacked" her first au pair. "Sacked my first

au pair last night #awkwardmuch". They had recently hired a 35-year-old woman from Slovenia called Sofia, who they thought wanted a gateway into Ireland for a better job. Before she arrived, they emailed her an au pair contract. There is no working contract for au pairs in Ireland, the majority of my host family participants use the European template from AuPair World.com. Additionally, they created a 'rules and duties' document for their au pairs to fit into their family. At the beginning of Sofia's journey, everything was going smoothly because she followed the contract, duties, rules and tried to settle in with the family. They noticed at the beginning that she didn't have much awareness of personal space and they concluded that she is adjusting to a "stranger's home" and needs some more time. Unlike other au pairs that spent most of their free time outside the house or in their bedroom, Sofia wanted to spend her free time with the family. Niamh said.

> I love when au pairs spend time with us and we can watch TV and have a drink together, but Sofia was too much, she started mimicking me, touching me, coming into my room, office, she never closed her bedroom door and wanted to spend every minute with me. I started to work late in my office (her office is at home because of the pandemic) just to have a break from her and I felt like a stranger in my own home because I was afraid to go into the living room, I knew she'd be there.

The above quote from Niamh indicates that her au pair was visible in their home but instead of disempowering the au pair, it in fact disempowered the host family. Niamh and Tom had to ask Sofia to leave their host family, and this was done gently by Niamh who told her to take her time to make other arrangements. Before Niamh and Tom asked their au pair to leave, they tried to negotiate boundaries with Sofia. They spoke to her about boundaries and when this did not work, they tried to hide from her in their house. They also tried to sneak out without telling her in case she invited herself. Niamh and Tom had the power to resolve the intrusion on their boundaries by asking

their au pair to leave, but as an au pair Sofia had no other choice but to leave the house of her hosts.

Rosalee was Niamh and Tom's previous au pair before Sofia (see Chapter Six). Rosalee is a 27-year-old from France. Before she became an au pair in Ireland, she was living with her boyfriend in an apartment. She worked for a logistic company, and she managed a storage warehouse receiving "a good salary". During the lockdown she expressed that her life became too stressful, because she broke up with her boyfriend and she was alone in a small apartment. Rosalee valued her personal space and tried to create boundaries with her host family (Niamh and Tom), because Ireland was in lockdown, and she liked to spend her "free time" in her bedroom. Rosalee recalled one incident where her time spent in her room was "rudely" interrupted by the host father. She stated that the host dad does not get up until 10 or 11 o'clock in the morning everyday while everyone else including the host mom has to get up and do domestic tasks. One weekend when Rosalee was catching up on some sleep the host dad put a real rooster outside her door as a practical joke. The rooster's crowing woke her up with a shock and she went into the kitchen and the host dad was laughing. Rosalee did not find this joke funny and thought it was an invasion of her privacy.

This is another explanation of encroachments on boundaries and physical space in the home. The rooster wasn't in her room, yet she felt her privacy was violated. She also found it to be disrespectful because she didn't have a good relationship with the host dad. She reflects, "Maybe if we were friends or closer this might have been funny, but I don't get to sleep in ever and he ruined that". Rosalee identified her personal and spatial boundaries through rupture, and she expressed to me that she had learned to say "no" to her host family and rectified some of her issues with Niamh and Tom.

Some host families have taken a different approach to maintain boundaries within the home. Macy had learned through experience that she needed a more invisible, or "professional", domestic worker rather than an au pair who is, by definition, to be welcomed into the family. Niamh and Tom, too, did not want an equal adult family member. It impinged on their 'actual' family and their ability to live comfortably in their home to have an au pair with equal access to them as their children would have. And in Caroline's example, as an au pair who wished to maintain boundaries away from her host family, she was punished by being too visible (by being asked to perform additional tasks) and punished by not being visible enough (uninvited from 'family' dinner when she was not home on time). In this case, Caroline did not want to participate in family life where her free time was imposed upon and controlled. While the criteria of the au pair programme is to incorporate them into family life, it is clear that au pairs and host families do not always manage to find a balance.

Rollins' (1985:170) research on African American live-in domestic workers thoroughly analyses the most pressing historical and present issues concerning the employer-household worker relationship. From an insider perspective on domestic work, she shows that the "domestics" need to have respect for their employers' personal and spatial boundaries, but this does not need to be reciprocated by employers. Rollin (1985: 171) states that

> Spatial deference takes two main forms in domestic service: the unequal rights of the domestic and the employer to the space around the other's body and the controlling of the domestic's use of house space. The domestic does not initiate touching her employer and is careful to respect the private space around the employer's body by maintaining distance. The respect shown in the honoring of the employer's body space gives a message similar to that given by the domestic's limited use of language: the retention of greater distance suggests that the employer's mental and physical privacy are more valuable and therefore should not be easily intruded upon.

So, while Niamh and Tom felt their au pair was out of line to intrude on their space, they have also impinged on their au pair's [Rosalee] personal space (see above).

Contract example and au pair duties

Below are examples of Niamh and Tom's rectified contract and duties for their new au pair after encroachments on their personal and spatial boundaries with Sofia. The contract is a template from AuPair World.com with some minor changes to suit their family. However, what is important here are the major changes to the 'children's weekday routine' and au pair duties. Niamh and Tom decided to put in fine details for their new au pair to avoid any complications of what is expected of them. They believe that this helps them form a healthy relationship and create necessary boundaries for themselves and their au pair.[66]

IV. DISCIPLINE
Discipline: Reasons which could give rise to disciplinary measures are as follows: · Causing a disruptive influence in the household. · Job incompetence. · Conduct during or outside working hours prejudicial to our interests. · Unreliability in timekeeping or attendance. · Failure to comply with our reasonable instructions or procedures. In the event of a need for disciplinary action, the procedure will be: · First – a verbal warning. · Second – a written warning. · Third – dismissal without need for further notice. Reasons which would give rise to summary dismissal would be: · Theft or other dishonest offences. · Drunkenness. · Illegal drug taking. · Child abuse or neglect.
Children's weekday routine · Children to be awake from 8:00- 8:15am · Breakfast (usually cereal/ porridge/ muesli/ toast/fruit). · Dress children in Uniform- Clean vest, socks, pants, (there is a spare uniform in their room). X will do this herself, with some help. X will need a bit more help. They have a bedside locker each, containing pants, socks, and vests.

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[66] It should be noted that I have only included the amended section of Niamh and Tom's contract.

· Clean Teeth. There is a toothbrush for both girls in the small downstairs bathroom and upstairs. X only likes a little bit of toothpaste.

· Wash hands and face. There is a facecloth on the hook under the sink in kitchen.

· Brush their hair thoroughly and always tie up, with clips.

· They always wear coats and hat to school during cold weather.

· Make sure their school bags have a pencil case and required books and folders, and a bottle of water.

· Leave for school by 09:10 am. They need to arrive at school for 9:20am.

· Collect girls from school at 3pm. (This sometimes changes with after school activities)

· After school, they take off their uniforms to keep them clean. Please remind them to put the uniforms on their hooks in their room. Help them to get dressed in normal clothes of their choice again. If the uniform is dirty, put it in a quick (20-30 mins long) wash in the washing machine and place it on the clothes rack upstairs.

· Playtime/snack time

· Sit at the booth and help both with their homework. Please limit your own distraction including phone time and focus on her homework. Please sign the homework sheet when finished and pack their bags away. Please have the homework completed by 6pm, as they will be tired later in the evening. It is ok if they want to keep a small amount later to do with Niamh or Tom.

· After homework is a good time to do some reading with the girls on the couch, it will help your English too if you read for them. Try to keep TV programmes to a minimum. The girls are not allowed screen time on mobile phones.

· the youngest child may have a nap around 5pm or 6pm on the couch if she seems tired. Pease limit this to about 30 minutes if she does fall asleep.

General Household Duties

· Keep the kitchen tidy throughout the day, and empty/load the dishwasher as required.

· Sweep and wash the floor (including the bathroom floor in utility room) of the main living area when you have time, ideally every day. Keep the mop bucket outside the back door of the house to avoid accidents.

· Help and encourage the children to tidy away their toys, both downstairs and in their bedroom

· Sweep/vacuum the stairs once a week

· The children's laundry basket is in their bathroom upstairs. Wash a load of their laundry once a week and put away in their wardrobe.

· Empty the kitchen bins as required.

We want our au pair to be comfortable in our home and feel part of the family rather than a guest. Everyone helps and cleans and tidies up after themselves and after family meals.

The au pair is always welcome to use the kitchen and cook for the family anytime! As part of our cultural exchange, it would be nice if the Au pair cooked an evening meal of their choice once a week. We can get ingredients in advance if required.

We normally have a drink and watch TV in the living room after the children are gone to bed. You are welcome to join us and relax with us, we encourage this rather than you confining yourself to your room. It gives you a chance to learn English through us and the TV in a relaxed way.

Lunch/Snack Ideas

Bread/Crackers/Cheese/Peanut Butter/Jam/ Pasta/Beans/Eggs and Toast/Dinner leftovers/Rice Pudding/ Yoghurt/ Pancakes

Please keep sweets and treats to a minimum.
General Notes
· No smoking or drinking alcohol for the driver or passengers in the car.
· No smoking within the house or with the door open. Please close the door and smoke outside or in the shed.
· When petrol is needed for the car let Niamh and Tom know. If you place petrol in the car let us know and we will reimburse you. Do not let the car get very low on petrol as this will damage the engine. If you notice anything unusual with the car, notify us immediately.
· Be careful of the knives in the kitchen. They are very sharp!
· Feel free to contact us at any time if you have any questions.

Figure 15: Niamh and Tom's rectified contract

In the amended contract above, Niamh and Tom added a section called 'IV DISIPLINE' they note that they will 'fire' an au pair if she commits "Theft or other dishonest offences; Drunkenness; Illegal drug taking; Child abuse or neglect". Interestingly, they did not mention encroachment of boundaries for a reason of dismissal especially after 'sacking' their previous au pair precisely because of boundaries being broken. Edward Hall's (1959) classic book 'The Silent Language' states that

> Man has developed his territoriality to an almost unbelievable extent. Yet we treat space somewhat as we treat sex. It is there but we don't talk about it. And if we do, we certainly are not expected to get technical or serious about it. The man of the house is always somewhat apologetic about "his chair." How many people have had the experience of coming into a room, seeing a big comfortable chair, and heading for it, only to pull themselves up short, or pause and turn to the man and say, "Oh, was I about to sit in your chair?" The reply, of course, is usually polite. Imagine the effect if the host were to give vent to his true feelings and say, "Hell, yes, you're sitting in my chair, and I don't like anybody sitting in my chair!" For some unknown reason, our culture has tended to play down or cause us to repress and dissociate the feelings we have about space. We relegate it to the informal and are likely to feel guilty whenever we find ourselves getting angry because someone has taken our place. (Hall 1959: 188-189)

Hall (1959) examines space from an American perspective and compares it to space in other countries. If personal space and boundaries are similar to sex and we don't talk about it or sometimes feel guilty about it. This could indicate why Tom and Niamh ignored it in their amended contract. Niamh and Tom may feel embarrassed about

what happened with their previous au pair. Instead, they added a section called 'children's weekly routine' and here they clearly provide a step-by-step guide for au pairs to follow without confusion of their role within the family.

Conclusion:

This chapter investigates and indicates the blurring of boundaries between the private and public areas of the house. It analyses visibility and invisibility as interrelated forces which influence boundaries. However, once a boundary has been breached it can be identified, and in some cases, rectified (See Niamh and Tom's new contract and au pair duties above). This chapter also focuses on the public and private divide in the home with regards to employment of an au pair. I look at the home as a map of public spaces and private places for the au pair and or host family. I argue that spaces outside the au pairs bedroom can be referred to as the public realm in the home. Boundaries are mutually agreed, they provide space and comfort for the host family and au pairs alike. But when these public and private spaces are at odds with each other, the relationship can be difficult and the spaces, like the relationships are somewhat fluid. Therefore, rectifying these relationships relies on the host family and au pair's ability to negotiate and communicate what they need. Otherwise, the atmosphere in the home can be strained and can ultimately lead to the au pair leaving or being "sacked" from the household.

While both au pairs and hosts consider a room to be an important part of the au pair's stay, the terms under which an au pair has a room in her hosts' home are sometimes considerably different from those of a house guest. Uncertain borders, ambiguous and conflicting views of family membership, and varied expectations from the host and au pair all contribute to the challenging and essential management of spaces. The ability

to navigate these conflicts and expectations ultimately contribute to the successful integration of the au pair into the home.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion
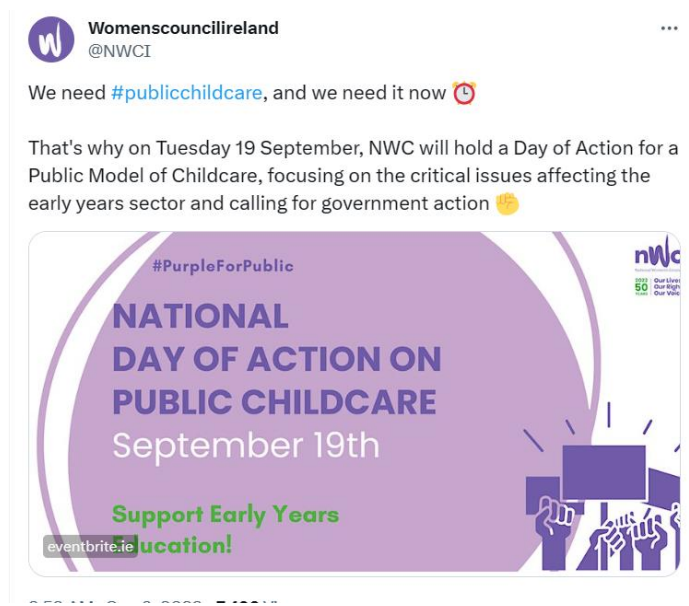
On September 19, 2023, the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) campaigned for a universally accessible, publicly funded and provided, affordable, and not-for-profit early years education and school-age childcare system. They urged people in Ireland to share their personal experiences regarding the childcare crisis on social media, all while donning purple attire and using the hashtag #purpleforpublic. This initiative occurred ahead of the government's 2024 budget announcement, which was made on Tuesday, October 10, 2023.[67] On October 3rd, just a week before the 2024 budget, the #purpleforpublic campaign sparked a discussion in the Dáil, prompting Senator Paul Gavan[68] to remark,

> The second issue I wish to raise is that of early years educators. There are real difficulties at the joint labour committee at the moment. It seems that the employer side, including the Federation of Early Childhood Providers, which was outside these buildings last week, proposed a pay increase of 65 cent for early years educators. In other words, instead of getting the early years educators getting €13 an hour, which all present would agree is entirely inadequate, the employers are proposing €13.65. That is not in any way

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[67] Find further details below on the government's budget for the year 2024.
[68] Senator Paul Gavan is an Irish Sinn Féin politician who has been serving as a Senator for the Labour Panel since April 2016.

acceptable. I did not hear that message last week when they were outside the gates of the Parliament. It is clear a sustainable pay rise is needed to enable people to have a career in early years education. It is interesting to note that the Minister, Deputy O'Gorman, said he allocated €200 million for pay increases in the budget last year. According to SIPTU, only €55 million of that has been spent on pay increases. There is a real difference between what the employers' group is saying, with its offer of a pay increase of 65 cent an hour, and what the unions are saying. It is clear we need to move to a publicly funded childcare model. That is what the National Women's Council of Ireland, NWCI, has called for. My party, Sinn Féin, has been seeking for that to be done for some time. That is the debate we need to have in order to secure a real future for childcare and early years educators. Let us have that debate in this Chamber as soon as possible. We cannot sit through another budget where workers on the front line continue on wages that are entirely unacceptable in this day and age.

(Gavan 2023)

Expressing concurrence with Senator Paul Gavan, Senator Rebecca Moynihan[69] said,

Last week, providers closed their crèches for the day and took part in a campaign outside the gates of Leinster House. The previous week, however, the NWCI held the Purple for Public campaign. A significant amount of work has been done on this issue by the NWCI and SIPTU's Big Start campaign. The childcare crisis is not new. It has been going on for many years. We know thousands of places throughout Dublin are closing down. Why is that the case? It is because childcare has been left up to the ebb and flow of the free and private market. My local crèche in my constituency of Dublin South-Central closed last year. A new planning application has been lodged for the site but it does not include the provision of a crèche. Instead, it includes the provision of a private gym. The private childcare system has failed. Parents are exhausted from months of stressing about securing affordable childcare. Children are being ferried out of their communities to scarce services. Staff are worried about whether their facilities can continue to run and are in low-pay, precarious jobs. We need a new model that guarantees affordable, local and secure childcare for every stakeholder. That cannot be delivered through the private system that is currently being operated. It must be a public system, akin to how primary schools are operated. Staff should be on public employment contracts with fair wages, children should be guaranteed a place and parents should not be price gouged. We should not be relying on private developers to provide those facilities, some of which are completely inadequate. Instead, just as the Department of Education does for schools, there should be forward planning for childcare needs and then the provision of those facilities. The only way we can guarantee secure, affordable and accessible childcare is by letting the State intervene and it being the leader in it, funding, managing and creating more

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[69] Senator Rebecca Moynihan has served as an Irish Labour Party politician, representing the Administrative Panel since April 2020

childcare options in our community. If the Government fails to step up on this, it is failing parents, children and workers in the childcare sector across the country.

(Moynihan, 2023)

Rebecca Moynihan and Paul Gavan are emphasizing the challenges within the childcare sector, advocating for an enhancement of budgetary allocations in this area or a transition to a public model, as proposed by the National Women's Council. However, what are the perspectives of families (predominantly women) in Ireland regarding formal childcare? The NWCI showcased individuals' feedback on their platform to underscore the issues within the existing childcare model. Below are selected testimonials from women expressing their concerns about the current childcare model in Ireland.[70]

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[70] See Childcare Campaign: A Public Model » The National Women's Council of Ireland (nwci.ie) for a complete review of women's testimonials (NWCI 2023).

It's gotten to a point where I am mentally exhausted from trying to juggle work and this uncertainty around how my child will be cared for and finding there's increasing pressure for me to give up my career to stay at home, something I categorically do not want to do.

It's an absolute nightmare trying to find and afford childcare in the country. Firstly, I was forced to take a big chunk of unpaid leave due to having no childcare in place and most crèches closing their baby rooms (another argument why 26 weeks paid mat leave is not enough)You get absolutely no help from the government for this and with the cost of living, we relied heavily on family for financial help. We've been on waiting lists for over a year now and still no place, and not sure how we're going to financially afford one if it does come up with the cost of everything going up. We have had to rely on unregistered childminders, one of which gave us hours notice not to take our child back.

I have three friends who have given up their careers as a teacher, civil servant and an SNA because childcare costs are prohibitive to them working.

All women. All now "housewives" and not through choice but because their male partners earn more.

Childcare costs fuel inequality

This. We finally got a spot at a crèche that is 10km or 35 mins drive away (more in rush hour traffic each way). It's a great crèche, but our daughter spends so much longer than I would like in the car, not to mention the extra costs of transport on top of the fees. We're not getting to know parents and kids locally because none of the local crèches had space for her, despite putting her name down at 4 wks old. It's a jungle out there.
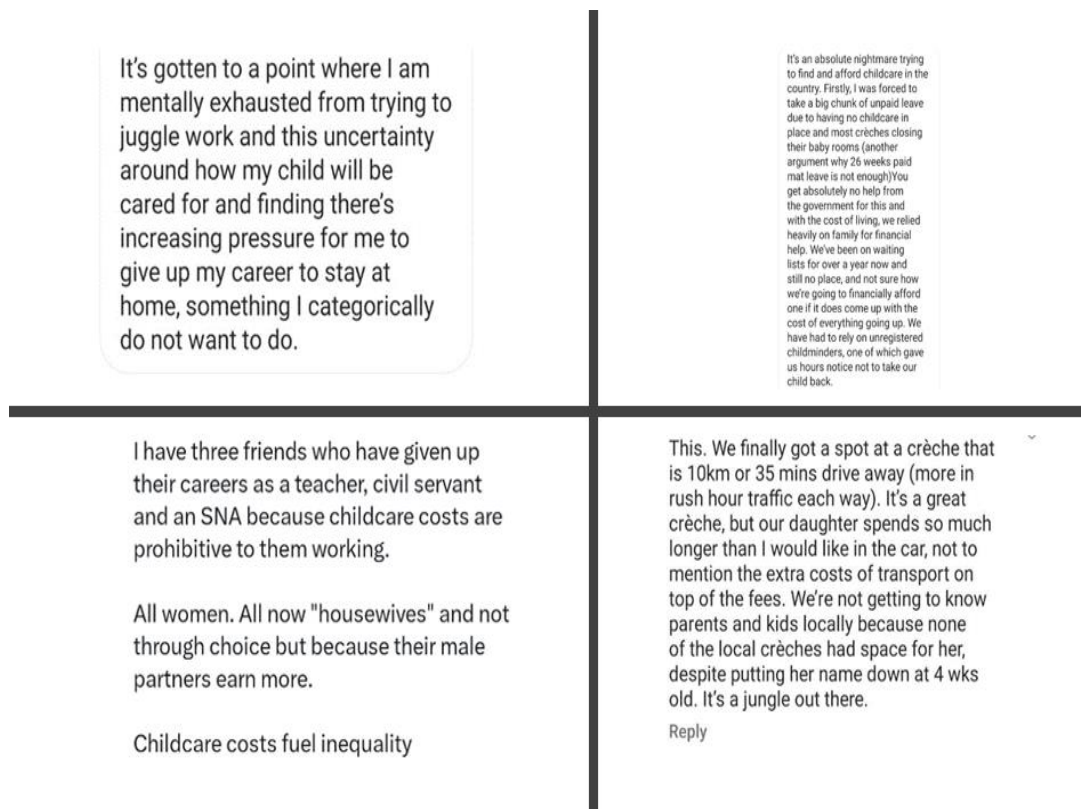
Reply

Figure 16: Women's testimonials on NWCI.

Since the initiation of my fieldwork, the topic of childcare in Ireland has been a persistent subject of discussion. I am intentionally documenting the aforementioned campaign, government debates, and public testimonials in this conclusion to underscore the persistent issues within the early childhood sector in Ireland. These problems continue to be unresolved, and significant changes have yet to occur in this sector. In Chapter Two of this thesis, I presented an ethnographic portrayal of the protests unfolding in Ireland during my fieldwork in 2020. These protests varied in scale, encompassing a small rally organized by a crèche owner in Carlow outside their establishment and a larger protest in Dublin boasting over 30,000 participants. The common objectives of these protests included advocating for a reduction in insurance fees, higher wages for staff, decreased costs for parents, and a call for greater respect

and recognition for this predominantly female-centric profession. Presently, there is a growing public discourse regarding the necessity of establishing a public childcare system in Ireland. The testimonials above illuminate the difficulties women confront while navigating the delicate balance between childcare and their careers. For some, these challenges include retaining their careers due to concerns regarding the affordability and accessibility of childcare. Moreover, many women contend with rooted gendered ideologies indicating that a woman's role should be within the domestic sphere.

Chapter Two thoroughly explores Ireland's social, religious, and legislative frameworks, unravelling the intricate connection between childcare and historical contexts. Traditionally, informal family networks have placed the responsibility of childcare on mothers, but the 1990s saw a pivotal shift with the introduction of legislated childcare. Despite these advancements, formal childcare facilities face significant challenges, including inflexibility in opening hours for shift workers, high costs related to rent, insurance, staff salaries, and parent fees, limited accessibility for low-income families and restricted spaces for children, and low wages for staff. In addressing these complexities, au pairs appear as crucial contributors to the childcare system. Chapter Two delves into the intricate dynamics of micro-mobilities within the realm of childcare, incorporating the influence of social policies and cultural factors. This exploration is guided by the conceptual framework of care loops (Isaksen and Näre 2019; Búriková 2019). Such dynamics might involve instances where the au pair participates in dropping off and picking up children from preschool. Most host mothers in this study, with children over the age of 2 years 8 months, avail of the ECCE scheme, providing three hours of free childcare per day. During the working

hours of the host mother, the au pair plays a crucial role in facilitating the micro-mobilities involved in caregiving.

The introduction of a public childcare model in Ireland would be beneficial for families facing challenges with the expenses associated with formal care. However, in the realm of flexible childcare, factors such as gender ideologies and social policies, including the six-month maternity leave, necessitate the involvement of au pairs to address gaps in the system. As outlined in Chapter One, au pairs are categorized as domestic workers in Ireland and should be remunerated with a minimum wage. It is noteworthy that, unlike formal childcare centres, the practice of au pairing lacks regulation by TUSLA. [71] Hence, it is at the discretion of host families to decide whether to register an employee (au pair) with the Irish revenue. Nevertheless, as elucidated in Chapter Three, both au pairs and host families harbour imagined expectations, often falling under the overarching term 'cultural exchange.' Influencing factors such as AuPair World contribute to shaping perceptions of what au pairing should entail for both parties. Interestingly, all host families in this study chose not to register their au pair, expressing a lack of inclination or belief in the necessity to do so. Furthermore, au pairs perceived their role as integral to a cultural exchange or becoming part of an Irish family, anticipating the receipt of 'pocket money.' Even those expressing dissatisfaction with their remuneration were not fully aware that they should be paid a minimum wage.

In Chapter Three, as mentioned above, a deeper exploration of the imagined expectations of both au pairs and host families is undertaken. Influencing factors, such as online au pair agencies, play a significant role in shaping these expectations.

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[71] See Chapter Two.

Drawing inspiration from Benedict Anderson's "Imagined Communities" (1983) and Appadurai's (1996) framework of "imagined worlds", the chapter establishes a theoretical foundation for understanding the shared, imagined expectations among participants. The research scrutinizes the various perspectives on imagined expectations, encompassing articulated anticipations, influential factors shaping these expectations, and the societal values associated with au pairing as reflected on governmental websites.

Expectations arise for both au pairs and host families before their initial contact and persist as they navigate their relationship. Chapter Four concentrates on how host families establish social and symbolic boundaries within the household. Some host families utilize boundaries to strengthen the employee-employer connection, while others aim to create a family-like atmosphere for the au pair by minimizing barriers. Host families hold the advantage in deciding whether to integrate or separate au pairs from the family and whether to emphasize or diminish hierarchical differences. Whether an au pair is 'family' or 'not family' is not a binary, but rather a spectrum that varies depending on the context and individuals involved. Wallman's (1978) framework of boundary processes proves relevant in understanding how boundaries are set during the initial interaction between au pairs and host families. The concept of 'boundary marking' is particularly pertinent, with some host families defining clear boundaries and rules from the outset to underscore the distinction between "us" (the hosts) and "them" (the au pairs) (Wallman, 1978: 210-212). Conversely, other host families may adopt a more relaxed approach, fostering an environment with minimal boundaries, akin to being a "cool mom." I argue that these approaches exist on a continuum. Host families may lean towards one or more approaches to boundary marking based on changing circumstances and dynamics within the household. This

evolution can occur gradually as the relationship develops or right from the start. In line with the case studies, most host mothers engage in "mothering by proxy," a practice outlined by MacDonald (2010). This typically involves the au pair shadowing the host mother during the first week, following a detailed schedule, or relying on the au pair to anticipate the mother's preferences and make decisions aligned with those preferences without explicit guidance.

Building upon the content of Chapter Four, Chapter Five turned its attention to the influence of au pairs in shaping boundaries within their host family's home. Chapter Five provided ethnographic accounts detailing the strategies employed by au pairs to establish boundaries for privacy, their time, and the tasks they are responsible for. Nevertheless, the initial interaction between au pairs and host families is crucial, carrying substantial weight as it establishes the groundwork for achieving a positive first impression —an essential objective for both parties. Yet, for au pairs, the concept of 'emotional labor' (Hochschild 1983) frequently becomes interwoven with their perception of the anticipated au pair role.

Becoming part of a family may not occur immediately or even at all. The establishment of boundaries, both by au pairs and host families, can yield positive and/or negative outcomes in the formation of familial connections. Chapter Six contends that the use of fictive kinship terminology serves as a way to circumvent acknowledging the fluid nature of 'family,' where family members can be transient and undergo significant changes. Chapter Six challenges the notion that fictive or pseudo kinship implies a fixed idea of 'family,' suggesting that there is a distinct category of 'real' family. In reality, 'family' is better understood as a dynamic process, that can be shaped and developed through practise, (Bourdieu 1977; Carsten 2000).

The exploration of these relationships involves an examination of the language used by participants to describe their interactions and routines, thereby characterizing their connection and experiences as either 'a member of the family' or an 'employee.' Kinship connections are dynamic and may undergo evolution over time and can end due to the contractual nature of their relationship (Amrith and Coe 2022). The feelings of being a mother, daughter, sister, or friend may not develop instantly or may not manifest at all. Relationships can change from being kin-like initially to becoming non-kin-like, and mutual dislike or shifts in kin-like attributes can occur. Relationships are not always harmonious, and boundaries can be crossed.

In Chapter Seven, I examined the consequences of breaching various types of boundaries between host families and au pairs. Chapter Seven explored the blurred boundaries between the private and public areas of the house, examining the dynamics of visibility and invisibility as interconnected forces influencing these boundaries. However, Chapter Seven emphasized that once a boundary is breached, identification occurs, and corrective measures can be taken for example, the creation of a new contract for au pairs. Chapter Seven also delves into the division between public and private spaces in the context of employing an au pair. The home is viewed as a map of public and private zones for both the au pair and host family. I contend that areas beyond the au pair's bedroom can be considered the public realm within the home. Au pairs' bedrooms are contested spaces. Boundaries mutually agreed upon, but constantly negotiated, serve to provide space and comfort for both the host family and the au pair. However, when conflicts arise between these public and private spaces, the relationship becomes challenging, and both the spaces and relationships are somewhat fluid. Therefore, resolving these issues relies on the host family and au pair's ability to negotiate and communicate their needs. Otherwise, tensions in the

home can escalate, potentially leading to the au pair's departure or dismissal from the household.

Contribution to Anthropology

This thesis makes a substantial contribution to the ongoing discussions in anthropological kinship studies (see Chapter One and Six) by aiming to bridge the gaps between debates on boundary and boundary work research (as discussed in Chapters Four and Five) and research on the 'imaginaries' (covered in Chapter Three). My research examines the chronological journey of au pairs and host families in Ireland, utilizing a theoretical framework that entangles research on the imaginaries, social and symbolic boundaries, boundary work, and fictive kinship. By unifying these frameworks under the overarching concept of kinship, kinship becomes the central focus, providing an explanation of how families are envisioned, established, developed, sustained, and/or disrupted.

My research contributes to a vital yet often overlooked area in contemporary Irish anthropology by examining kinship in Ireland, particularly focusing on the integration of au pairs into the family unit and the establishment and maintenance of social, symbolic, and spatial boundaries. This dual understanding of shared spaces enriches the comprehension of au pairing and hosting in Ireland. Additionally, this study addresses the research gap concerning au pairs and host families in Ireland by providing significant ethnographic detail on the co-constitution of Irish family life.

This thesis explores the complexities of issues within the early childhood sector, such as affordability, staff shortages, and inflexibility, highlighting the significant role au pairs play in addressing these gaps. It also examines how host families and au pairs establish or diminish social and symbolic boundaries, demonstrating that this is not a

binary issue but a spectrum where individuals may be perceived as part of the family or as employees, depending on the context and the people involved. Furthermore, this thesis challenges the concept of fictive kinship, arguing that family should be understood as a dynamic process shaped through practices and capable of dissolving over time.

By examining the perspectives of au pairs, host families, policymakers, early childhood educators, and au pair agency workers, this research offers a clearer understanding of these complex relationships. This comprehensive approach is crucial for presenting a deeper understanding of all participants' lived experiences and perspectives. By engaging with these varied viewpoints, this dissertation has the potential to inform public debates, enhance understanding, and influence policies. This study delves into the everyday lives of au pairs and host families during a global pandemic and amid nationwide discussions about challenges in the early childhood sector. By initiating these conversations, this research aims to understand and challenge the dynamics at play, providing evidence and support for future legislation and policies that can drive positive change in the early childhood sector and improve conditions for au pairs and host families in Ireland. Additional this thesis Elaborates on early childhood, social policy and sociological literature and also utilizes the concept of care loops as an organizational factor to illustrate in the Irish context the micromobility of care.

My research serves as a timely record, as the early childhood sector was, and continues to be, a hot topic among the public. Just before the onset of COVID-19, small and large-scale protests were organized nationwide, advocating for changes in the sector (see Chapter Two). The pandemic and resulting restrictions highlighted these issues,

with preschool closures exacerbating problems for families working both from home and outside the home. This thesis documents both the successful and unsuccessful aspects of au pair and host family relationships, capturing how the au pairs' experiences evolved as families transitioned to working from home during the pandemic and how these changes affected the dynamics between au pairs and host families.

This research provides unique insights due to its long-term nature, capturing the lived experiences of au pairs and host families both before and during a global pandemic. I documented changes in early childhood social policy schemes and observed the shift in activism during COVID-19 from large in-person protests to online activism, with demands for changes in the early childhood sector flooding newspapers and social media. The longitudinal aspect of this research allowed me to examine multiple changes of au pairs within different households, highlighting the shifts that can occur within kinship or pseudo-kin relationships. For instance, I observed several au pair changeovers within a single household.

This research incorporates a temporal dimension, with chapters organized chronologically to reflect participants' lived experiences. Theories related to imaginaries, social and symbolic boundaries, boundary work, fictive kinship and kinship are explored within this temporal context, illustrating how these dynamics evolve over time in the domain of au pair work. This temporal aspect contributes to the gradual creation or breakdown of family structures.

A note on the future of Ireland: #VoteYES #VoteNO

A referendum took place in Ireland on March 8th, 2024, to determine whether the wording of Article 41 in the Irish Constitution (1937) should be modified or retained.

'The Care Amendment' pertains to Article 41.2 which reads today; "In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the state a support without the common good cannot be achieved." And "The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home." (Article 41.2, Constitution of Ireland, 1937)[72]. The proposed modification to Article 41.2 will read as follows:

> The State recognises that the provision of care, by members of a family to one another by reason of the bonds that exist among them, gives to Society a support without which the common good cannot be achieved, and shall strive to support such provision.

> (The Electoral Commission 2023)

The proposed constitutional amendment removes the gender-specific perception that the state defines and supports a woman's role within the domestic realm. As shown in Chapter Two gendered ideologies, such as ideals of motherhood, continue to exert influence today. This is evident in the gendered dynamics of caregiving, notably observed in this research on au pairs and the responsibility for recruiting, hiring, and dealing with au pairs predominantly falls on host mothers.

However, another proposed change in the constitution is the 'The Family Amendment' seeking to modify Article 41.1.1 and 41.3.1. Article 41.1.1 currently reads as "The State recognises the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law". And 41.3.1. "The State pledges itself to guard with special care the institution of Marriage, on which the Family is founded,

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[72] See Chapter Two.

and to protect it against attack". The proposed modifications to Article 41.1.1 will read

as follows

> The State recognises the Family, whether founded on marriage or on other durable relationships, as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law.
>
> (The Electoral Commission 2023)

And Article 41.3.1 will be edited to read as follows

> The State pledges itself to guard with special care the institution of Marriage, ~~on which the Family is founded,~~ and to protect it against attack.
>
> (ibid 2023)

At the time of writing, this referendum holds significant relevance due to the ongoing

discourse surrounding the gendered aspects of care work in Ireland, with continuous

public protests occurring since the commencement of this research, further

exacerbated by the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic (see above and

Chapter Two). Moreover, the concept of family can be challenging to define, with

essentialist notions centred on birth ties and marriage prevailing in ideological

narratives in Ireland. The referendums on family and care were defeated by vote. 67%

of voters cast a no vote for 'The Family Amendment' and 74% of voters cast a no vote

for 'The Care Amendment'. Although the populace voted against both amendments,

it is crucial to acknowledge that 'practical'[73] conceptions of kinship—encompassing

the ongoing maintenance of relationships and considerations beyond biology—are

gaining recognition in Irish law.

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[73] See Amrith and Coe (2022), Bourdieu (1977) and Carsten's (2000) concept of 'relatedness'.

This ethnographic study traces the chronological journey of au pairs and host families, exploring the connections between expectations, the establishment, maintenance, and disruption of boundaries, and the dynamics of kinship relations. It highlights how kinship ties can be crafted between au pairs and host families, yet also acknowledges the potential for these bonds to dissolve over time or never happen at all.

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