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Biographical Agency of Male Au Pair Migration to Germany

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Abstract: Au pair mobility has long been dominated by females. In recent years, young men have also begun to travel abroad as au pairs, but little is known about their motives and perspectives on this gender atypical migration pathway and occupation. Based on Schütze's concept of biographical patterns, dynamics and change processes this article shows how young men use the au pair stay as a biographical moratorium of emerging adulthood. By transcending expectation patterns of masculinity in their home and receiving context, they initiate a biographical turning process which allows them to escape a life course trajectory in their home country that is determined by high unemployment and access highly skilled jobs in Germany. In the au pair families, they are expected to perform "caring masculinity" for male children to substitute the missing participation of fathers. Hence, the commodification of care work does not only imply the outsourcing of practical tasks to an employee but also relational work of doing gender within families.

Keywords: Biography, Care Work, Masculinity, Migration, Performativity, Au Pair

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Introduction

The au pair institution is a mobility scheme which allows young foreigners between 18 and 25 years of age to travel to another country by providing childcare and domestic work to a local family. In Germany, au pairs currently receive a monthly pocket money of 260 Euros and the family provides food and accommodation. Au pairs have to work up to 30 working hours per week (Bundesagentur für Arbeit 2013). Owing to the poor regulation and monitoring of the au pair stay (Cox/Busch 2016; Sekeráková Búriková 2016), unfair working conditions and exploitation are difficult to prevent, which lead to a significant amount of emotional labour by au pairs to cope with these experiences (Tkach 2014, 139).

Concerning the motives of families and au pairs, Zuzana Sekeráková Búriková and Daniel Miller state that for many families, it is the "least worst option" to cover the need for affordable domestic work and childcare, as well as for many au pairs to be internationally mobile in the face of restrictive immigration regulations (Sekeráková Búriková/Miller 2010: 33). Therefore, the au pair stay is an ambiguous social phenomenon between migration, waged work and care work within families, officially defined as a cultural exchange program offering "family integration" for young foreigners in exchange for "help" in the household. The au pair stay in Germany is restricted to 12 months, after that au pairs either return to their home country, migrate to another country or change into another visa type to be able to stay in the receiving country (most often: student visa by enrolling in University).

Au pair mobility has always been strongly dominated by young women, so that au pairs are automatically considered female. However, young men increasingly travel abroad as au pairs, although there are no statistics available about them (Rohde 2014, Sekeráková Búriková/Miller 2010). This trend coincides with the general discussion about the participation of men in private and public care work and its effects on social categories of masculinity (cf. Johansson/Klinth 2008; Gregory/Miller 2011; Elliott 2016; Laufenberg 2017).

Research on other forms of domestic and care work carried out by male migrants suggests that a re-masculinisation of these jobs is taking place in Europe (Kilkey et al. 2013) and may result in the construction of "subaltern masculinities" of male migrants. In her study on male domestic workers from Sri Lanka in

Italy, Lena Näre shows that employers construct them as "effeminate, asexual, and unthreatening" (Näre 2010, 65). Similarly, Ester Gallo shows that the Catholicism of Asian workers in Italy is used as a reference structure to construct "gendered models of the legitimate and trustable worker" (Gallo 2018: 180; cf. Scrinzi 2016). Other research highlights that even in subaltern social positions of men, forms of "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell 1995) may be reproduced. Ester Gallo and Francesca Scrinzi's (2016) study on male migrant care workers in Italy and Caterina Rohde's (2014) study on male au pairs show that men and women are allocated different tasks. In spite of the increasing awareness of researchers that male migrants are occupied in domestic and care work, little is known about the perspective of these men who have chosen a migration pathway and an occupation that is strongly dominated by women.

The aim of this article is to analyse biographical narratives of three male au pairs from Slovakia, Ukraine and Russia and reveal why and how they entered into au pair migration, how they perceive their au pair work and how their lives have developed after the au pair phase.

In accordance with Sekeráková Búriková and Miller (2010), this text will analyse the au pair stay as a rite de passage from youth to adulthood because, through au pairing, the interviewed men were able to leave their parental home and begin an autonomous life. Hence, the theoretical perspective of this article draws on the concept of "emerging adulthood" (Arnett 2000), which is the biographical phase between youth and adulthood encompassing the structural and emotional dissolution from the family of origin.

The methodology is shaped by the concept of process structures of the life course by Fritz Schütze, which helps to understand the relation between the impact of social institutions on one's life and individual agency. For Schütze, migration represents individual biographical action in life phases, which do not have a pre-defined institutional pattern (Schütze 1981). Schütze himself (2003) and others (Gültekin/Inowlocki/Lutz 2003; Kazmierska 2003) have demonstrated the usefulness of this concept for qualitative migration studies through the analysis of the case of "Hülya" – a young woman who migrated to Germany during the 1970s as a so-called guest worker. This case is comparable to that of au pairs in so far as it shows the process of identity development in the course of maturing and getting to know new cultural environments (Kazmierska 2003). Schütze's concept helps to reveal individual characteristics and agencies of a migrant's life as well as historical and social dimensions that shape the migration experience (Gültekin/Inowlocki/Lutz 2003).

The three individual cases will be investigated in separate chapters, which show how these young men explain their decision to become an au pair, descri-

be their relationship to the family and give meaning to the au pair stay for their future life. Even though the biographical stories of Filip from Slovakia, Taras from Ukraine and Alexander from Russia are unique, they reveal that the au pair stay is a multi-dimensional phenomenon which confronts young people with challenges of migration and low-waged care work. This takes place in a biographical phase that is characterized by the detachment from the parents and the search for an identity as an adult.

Gender and Migration in Emerging Adulthood

Biographical research focuses on revealing an individual's attributions of meaning or sense and action orientations based on their life experiences (Rosenthal 2008; Farrokhzad 2007). Nevertheless, this approach also recognizes that biographies are shaped by partners or parents and through the negotiation of the individual's own aims and desires with those of the "important other" (Geissler/Oechsle 2001). Across socio-historical variations, during youth and young adulthood children gradually attain autonomy from their parents in the so-called biographical phase of emerging adulthood (Arnett 2000). Maturing young people become financially independent by entering the employment market, moving out of their parents' house and starting a relationship or even their own family. Within this process, young people negotiate between their parents' expectations and hopes as well as their own wishes (Geissler/Oechsle 1996). Consequently, the transformation from childhood to adulthood also leads to a reconfiguration of family roles, and the relationship between parents and children becomes more egalitarian over the course of time (Graf/Knotte/Walter 2000).

If young adults experience migration during the phase of emerging adulthood, they go through a "double transformation process" (Günther 2009, 241), since the individual maturation and the confrontation with another cultural context take place at the same time. Migration during emerging adulthood confronts young adults with different challenges than their non-migrant peers. Their biographies are formed by individual agencies that go beyond customary biographical scripts and reveal their internal and external resources. Herewith, biographical agency becomes visible as a category of practice (Backewell 2010).

In the process of adopting social positions of adulthood, gender norms, which may vary greatly between sociocultural contexts but also between different generations in one context, are particularly important.[1] Underlying the

1 Young adults, who grew up during the dissolution of the Soviet Union, experienced a generational change of the gender order. In the traditional soviet gender contract, care work was solely the responsibility of women, who were also integrated into the labor market (White 2005). In the transition era, more complex gender dynamics appeared; some couples

dichotomy of femininity and masculinity, sociocultural norms channel different trajectories for young females and males into family and work. "Doing gender", referring to "socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine 'natures'" (West/Zimmermann 2002, 42), is deeply embedded into the identity building processes of emerging adulthood. Judith Butler argues that there is no pre-existing gender identity prior to its social constitution in repetitive embodied practices such as acts, gestures and language (Butler 1988, 136). Along with commonly held notions of femininity such as physical vulnerability, high emotionality, and attentiveness to the needs of others, performing care work within families and working in care-related occupations in general is regarded as an explicitly feminine activity (Robinson/Skeen/Flake-Hobson 1980, 234) and as women's "natural" domain. In contrast to that, "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell 1995) refers to men's assumed ability to dominate, which is related to strength, activeness, and the power to injure others, as well as a high sex drive. However, research also detects forms of idealized masculinity that include care work, such as in public discourses about "new" or "involved" fathers (Johansson/Klinth 2008; Gregory/Miller 2011). These "caring masculinities" (Elliott 2016) are perceived to reject domination as the central feature of masculinity and include values of care such as emotionality, interdependence and relationality. However, Sarah Hunter, Damien Riggs, and Martha Augoustinos argue that "caring masculinity" is not an entirely new form but broadens hegemonic masculinity by including aspects of care (Hunter/Riggs/Augoustinos 2017). This is also mirrored by findings of Stefanie Aunkofer, Michael Meuser and Benjamin Neumann showing that men participate only as much in parental leave as it does not impair their labour market participation (Aunkofer/Meuser/Neumann 2018). Thomas Johansson and Roger Klinth argue that "new fathers" responsibilities are rather to be found in playing and outdoor activities, while women continue to be responsible for the core household duties (Johansson/Klinth 2008).

Research on migrant care work highlights that commodified care not only includes performances of gender but also of other intersecting categories like ethnicity or culture. Maria Rerrich argues that the outsourcing of care work to migrant women results from the widespread assumption that women from

oriented towards a stronger gender division so that women withdrew from waged work, while other couples preferred more egalitarian gender roles integrating men into care work (Ashwin 2002; Rands 2002). My research on female Russian au pairs also shows that their preferred gender relations vary from rather egalitarian to a traditional gender division of care work and waged work. In all of the models, women are perceived to be the main responsible authority of care work and masculinity is mainly constituted through waged work even though men are expected to help with care work. These ideals cannot be traced back to the post-Soviet context only, but they are also prevalent in the social contexts that were experienced by these women as au pairs in Germany (Rohde-Abuba 2015).

less-privileged countries still hold *"natural competencies" for* care work, whereas these have vanished in the "Western world" due to its social development (Rerrich 2006, 48–49). Research on the increasing number of male care workers (Näre 2010; Gallo 2018) seems to confirm the traditional gender stereotyping of migrants: In a counter-position to "Western" hegemonic masculinity, male care workers are perceived to be feminine and identified through forms of "subaltern masculinities", while they still receive preferential treatment with regards to jobs in comparison to female workers (Gallo/Scrinzi 2016; Rohde-Abuba 2014). Following Bernhard Weicht, it can be argued that migrant care work, especially in the informal setting of private households, cannot be restricted to the performance of care tasks but always relates to the "physical and emotional presence of the carer" (Weicht 2010, 37), that constitutes identity through personal relationships with the recipients of the care. Hence, it can be assumed that young adult migrants entering into live-in care work actually have to cope with a "triple transformation process" in their biographical agency, that of their individual maturation, the confrontation with a new culture, and the expectations of identity performance in their employers' family contexts.

Methodological Approach

The sample consists of three cases representing young men from Slovakia, Ukraine, and Russia, who came to Germany as au pairs. The interviewees were found by chance during a research project on the migration of female au pair workers.[2] At the time of the interview, Filip and Taras had already been living in Germany for years, while Alexander just had started his au pair stay.

The data was collected using narrative biographical interviewing, which aims at generating biographical accounts that cover entire lives or particular life phases by stimulating narrations instead of asking closed questions. This way, interviewees are enabled to develop their own interpretations of their biographical decisions and are affected as little as possible by interpretations of the researcher.

Schütze (1981) developed the concept of "process structures" of the life course, which was used for the analysis of biographical patterns and their interrelation with biographical events and processes. This methodology helps to

2 The interviews of male au pairs were not included in the original project on au pairing, because the sample of males was too small to systematically analyse the impact of gender in comparison to female au pairs. I include references to research on female au pairs in this article whenever it is helpful to interpret the narratives of the interviewed male au pairs.

analyse these dynamics of the life course as well as the respective self-interpretations of the individual. Schütze differentiates the following process structures of the life course:

- "Institutional patterns and expectations of the life course" (Schütze 1981, 67, transl. CRA) refer to societal norms to fulfil roles and positions of social institutions (such as graduating from school).
- "Biographical action schemes" (ibid, 70, transl. CRA) mark intentional and planned individual agency to influence the course of one's own life.
- The concept of "trajectory" includes life phases of "disorderly social processes and processes of suffering [...] structured by conditional chains of events that one cannot avoid without high costs, constant breaks of expectations, and a growing and irritating sense of loss of control over one's life circumstances" (Riemann/Schütze 1991, 337). Suffering is the central experience and it is so severe that it impacts the individual's identity and social relations. Individuals may overcome trajectories by developing action schemes to control or escape trajectory dynamics (ibid. 351).
- "Biographical turning processes" (Schütze 1981, 76, transl. CRA), just as biographical actions schemes, may be based on longstanding internal desires or preferences of the individual, but become feasible due to a sudden and unexpected change of perception and opportunities, for example by the help of others.

Based on these different process structures the analysis of the single cases of male au pairs will show how biographical dynamics are channelled by societal institutions and norms, which impose certain biographical patterns on the individual. The analysis will also reveal how life courses are formed by individual agencies that makes use of, explore and expand biographical opportunities.

"Just getting out of here": The Case of Filip

Filip was born in 1979 in Slovakia in a small village. After graduating from high school with very good grades, he started to study civil engineering in Slovakia in accordance with his parents' wishes. After a short time, he gave up these studies because he was not interested in it and migrated to Italy for three months of seasonal work in harvesting along with some male friends. Subsequently he was drafted for military service. After that, he returned to his parents' place of residence and was unemployed for about one year due to the high unemployment and negative migration of this region. The pre-migration circumstances are characterized by Filip's failure to fulfil parental expectations of passing through uni-

versity into skilled work. He used military service as a temporary – and gender specific – solution to gain independence although returning home thereafter aggravated the relationship to his parents. Filip explains that during this time he had many conflicts with his family and friends, because they assumed that he was not trying hard enough to find work. The way Filip describes this situation in his interview represents a typical trajectory of increasing desperation in the sense of Schütze, because Filip failed in every way he tried to detach himself from his parents, while his friends had already completed this biographical passage.

> „It was very sad, because I was unemployed and I could not find any work and then I had stress at home. In this year I tried to find any opportunity to migrate to Germany [...] it didn't matter what it was, just getting out of here. Others left and I stayed at home, alone [laughing ironically]. This was definitely a very bad year [...]. My sister was an au pair girl in Germany and so was a girlfriend of mine. She placed an ad in the newspaper [in the German city where she worked, CRA] that an au pair boy is looking for a family for a year, yes. Two weeks later somebody answered and said that a family, well a single woman with two kids, is interested that I meet them."

The opening narrative of his interview shows that Filip's decision to become an au pair is framed as the only migration pathway that was open to him, because at that time he was not able to enter into typical migration pathways of other men from his region, like doing seasonal work in harvesting as he had done before. In his home region, the biographical action scheme of emigration had already been established by others as a typical means for young adults to enter into waged work, detach from their parents and possibly also send home remittances. As Filip did not succeed in entering into gender-typical migration forms, he had to modify this action scheme by taking up a feminized job.

Filip says that the main motive for migration was to earn money to support his family. He explains that, when he was still living with his parents, he observed how his friends would bring remittances upon their return:

> "They came back and had money and I had no money, only like 30 Euros of social welfare per month. Fifteen of them I gave to my mother, because I lived in my parents' house. I did not have much to have fun with. This year was very bitter for me."

Filip portrays au pair work to be in line with other non-skilled jobs of migrants from his region similar to harvesting. Thus, being an au pair in his biographical story is mainly constructed as a non-gendered form of unskilled labor migration. In his self-representation he therefore does not refer to au pairing as a form of "doing gender" but as "doing migration".

In the middle of the 1990s, when Filip became an au pair, au pair agencies had not yet discovered the demand for males. In opposite to female au pairs, who were often recruited by au pair agencies, Filip organized his au pair migration by himself and with the help of a friend. This event can be interpreted as a biographical turning point, but under the circumstances of immigration and employment regulations as well as his own uncertainties, it took him several years to finally settle into a stable life in Germany.

During his time as an au pair, Filip was working for a single mother of two boys, aged four and six years. The mother also employed a cleaning lady, who took care of the housework. Filip's tasks were to prepare breakfast for the children, drive them to school and kindergarten, pick them up in the afternoon and heat up an already prepared lunch for them as well as take care of them in the afternoon and evening, when the employer was not at home. So, he was employed to provide a form of "caring masculinity" that maintained a gendered division of reproductive work, as his female employer and the cleaning lady remained responsible for the housework while he was in charge of driving, babysitting and serving already prepared food (cf. role division in new fatherhood; Johansson/Klinth 2008).

Talking about why he was comfortable with au pair work, Filip explains that at home he had taken care of his younger cousins and neighbors many times before. Nevertheless, Filip was confronted by the expectations of his employer that he should be a male role model for the two boys in addition to his employer envisaging what may be described as "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell 1995), such as demonstrating physical strength and activity.

> "And I was put under pressure; she always wanted me to somehow play the father [...] to be a role model, a role model in many respects, yes. She always considered me a bad role model in certain respects because I could never be that perfect [...] she always wanted to tell me how to behave and how to do things."

Filip felt that he had been hired to substitute the missing father, which made him uneasy because he could not identify with the form of masculinity his employer wished for. After about six months, Filip had a fight with his employer because she criticized him for using her car too often without paying for the petrol, and spontaneously he decided to quit. He recalls the he was hoping his employer would apologise and ask him to stay but instead she told him that he would have to leave her house within two weeks of time. This put Filip in a precarious situation because his visa was bound to employment as an au pair. Again, with the help of a female friend, who was also au pairing in Germany, he found another family who employed him.

After a short time, he had developed a close relationship to the new family. The father of the family often asked Filip what he wanted to do with his life and encouraged him to study in Germany. Filip, who until then had avoided thinking about his future, began researching the courses of study at the local university. At the end of his au pair year enrolled in dental medicine, because he thought his fine motor skills and ability to interact with people would make him a good dentist. Thus, in sociological terms Filip, through au pairing, constructed a "biographical space of opportunity" (King/Koller 2009) for maturing that allowed him to develop an idea of what he could do with his life while simultaneously liberating himself from the pressures of his home context. After two and a half years in Germany, he finally visited his family in Slovakia:

> "I came home, even though with less [success, CRA] than I had planned, but at that time I didn't care anymore, because I was already studying and then you already have this status. It was really good because all of the acquaintances were proud of me. [...] It was really important that I saw my mother and father and the sister."

The return home is the closing narrative of his biographical story. It marks the end of the precarious biographical moratorium during which he, while living on the very small income of an au pair, was finally able to develop his career wish and transform the relationship to his parents from that of a dependent adolescent to an adult son, who is able to provide for his family. Soon after the interview, Filip graduated from university. Today he is a practicing dentist and supports his family with his income.

"In Germany, I became myself": The Case of Taras

Taras was born in 1977 and stems from a village in Western Ukraine. Both of his parents have been unemployed since the system change and economic crisis of the 1990s and work on their own farm. In order to attend a secondary school, he moved in with his aunt who was living in the nearest larger city. In secondary school, he was best in class and received very good grades in German. Taras started to study German and pedagogy to become a teacher in accordance with his parents' wishes who were hoping that he might use his language skills to work internationally in the future (cf. Rohde 2011).

The opening narrative of Taras is his enrolment in German studies:

> „My parents made that decision for me, or they made it with me, because in my region there are not that many opportunities to do a vocational training [...] So, my parents said, you are good in German and it makes sense

> that you study foreign languages and then maybe later you can work in Germany or interpret and I just thought that that doesn't sound bad."

After finishing his studies with distinction at the age of 22, Taras started to work as a teacher in a local college, while living with his parents due to low salary and outstanding wages. However, Taras enjoyed this job and decided to start his doctoral studies. As he thought that his German skills were not good enough for this, he started to look for opportunities to go to Germany. In opposition to Filip, who refused to finish the course of study his parents had chosen for him, before migration Taras did not question the life course his parents expected of him. Taras' wish to migrate temporarily to Germany did not result from a trajectory but rather was an intergenerational action scheme of him and his parents to improve his language skills and his labor market chances. Like Filip, he could not enter into the regular migration pathway of other young men, because he could not afford to participate in a student exchange in Germany. Therefore, he chose au pairing as an alternative way to carry out his action scheme. Taras was encouraged by his (male) professor, who provided him with the addresses of au pair agencies he until then had only provided to female students.

Taras reasons that because he was a "boy" it was hard to find a family. His use of the term "boy" indicates the he identified as a minor before migration, even though he was already 22 years old at the time. After a while, an agency found a German couple who were especially interested in a male au pair to care for their eleven-year-old son, while cleaning and cooking was done by a cleaning lady. So, here again "caring masculinity" did not include these tasks. However, he was supposed to accompany the boy to his leisure activities and spend time with him when the parents were not at home.

> "I had lots of fun with him. I brought him to music school by bike [...] I really developed a good relation to the boy when I taught him how to play guitar and I could also play the accordion and the family got me one. We had a nice time together; the child really liked that. We also played chess and other board games."

Like Filip, Taras was employed to take care of the boy and mainly performed leisure activities with him, but was not expected to replace parental roles as these were fulfilled by his employers. At first, Taras struggled with the specific parenting style in this family that was new to him:

> "I was surprised that the parents never [shouted] at the child or [something] like this [...] Well that they never put pressure on him but discussed everything with him. That was really strange for me. How can the child decide something in the family? What are the parents there for? If the parents tell him something, then it will be right."

The parental style in the au pair family contrasted the patriarchal parenting in his own family, as Taras says. Thus, au pairing allowed him to reflect on the impact patriarchal parenting had had on his own relationship to his parents as well as enabling him to liberate himself from the generational hierarchy in his family.

Apart from the patriarchal structure of the family, according to Taras, life in his home region was also characterized by patriotism and nationalism due to the conflict between the Ukrainian and Russian population in Ukraine. The ability to be open to other cultures is an important element in Taras' adult identity, which marks his disengagement from the restrictive worldview that he perceives to be present in his home region.

> "I met very different people. This is a huge benefit [of au pairing, CRA], I think, because my mentality totally changed [...] I have opened up to different cultures. The part [of Ukraine, CRA] where I live, there are patriots, nationalists [...] I have understood that there are also good Russians, good Asians or Jews or, well, everywhere there are good and bad people. This is how I really experienced it. That affected me. And when I come home and at home discuss with the people a bit, then they realize that the boy has changed. Well, they cannot pull me on their side. And if I had stayed in Ukraine, I would have never [had] a girlfriend, who is not Ukrainian. And now I am in a relation with a Muslim and I am Christian – I am really religious – and she speaks Russian and I speak Ukrainian [...] That we are together, will be a huge shock for my parents but they [will] have to cope with it."

Taras refers to the relationship with his Muslim Russian girlfriend as an indicator for his personal transformation. Taras explains that before he came to Germany at the age of 22, he was under pressure to fulfil the role of an adult, because he was already working as a teacher then. While living with his parents and under their authority, he felt as if he was still "almost a child". In contrast to that, young people in Western societies often experience the biographical phase of "emerging adulthood" (Arnett 2000), in which they leave their parents' house before they enter into employment and family making. Thus they experience a longer phase of autonomy. Taras, like Filip and Alexander, manufactured this phase himself, because the au pair migration and the subsequent studies in Germany extended his educational phase and offered him additional time to search for his adult identity independently of his parents. In Taras' words: "In Germany I became myself. I became free and more independent. I can say now what I want, I can feel what I want."

What Taras describes sounds like a "biographical turning process" (Schütze 1981, 76, transl. CRA) even though it was not initiated by any longstanding de-

sires resulting from a previous trajectory. On the contrary, the core of his narrative is the unexpected change of perceptions after moving to Germany, which helped him to reflect on the restrictive normative patterns of his home context and to develop norms differing from those of his parents. Even though Taras financially supported his parents from the beginning of his stay in Germany, for his identity as an adult man, the most important aspect was not his ability to provide for his parents. It was liberating himself from the patriarchal relationship to his parents and being able to make his own biographical choices that was crucial.

Currently, Taras, who enrolled in German university after the au pair phase, is working as a pedagogue in early childcare in a German city and is planning to introduce his girlfriend to his parents soon as they want to get married.

"The best way for me to come to Germany": The Case of Alexander

Alexander was born in 1988 in an industrial town in Southern Russia. His parent were academics but due to the economic crisis could not find any skilled work. His mother worked at a newsstand and his father in the postal service. When I met Alexander, he had just started his au pair stay a couple of months before and he spoke German exceptionally well. He explained that learning German had been his hobby for a long time, ever since he had started listening to the music of the German band Rammstein. Due to the fact that his family was not able to afford language classes, Alexander studied German by himself using books and online language partnerships with German speakers. After graduating from high school, Alexander started to study social work. Apart from biology, this was the only study course free of charge and he "preferred to work with people". However, he reasoned that this was not a "sensible decision" because even though he had graduated with very good marks he would not be able to find a job in this profession. Thus, in his early twenties, Alexander had reached an impasse. He was not able to take up a course of study or occupation that would allow him to utilize his cognitive skills in order to escape poverty. At that time, he had different jobs in the postal service, for an insurance company and in haulage. Still living with his family, he decided that he wanted to change something. He intended to follow his girlfriend to Germany who was studying there. From the beginning, his biographical action scheme encompassed studying in Germany, because he assumed that he would be able to take up a better-paid and more interesting job in Russia with a foreign university degree.

> "I followed her as an au pair because this was the best way for me to come to Germany, because as a student it is complicated and expensive. This way, I can earn a bit of money, improve my language skills and prepare myself for the studies. It was useful to come here as an au pair for one year, I think."

In his biographical narrative, working as an au pair was a stepping-stone to educational migration. Since he could not prove the financial resources of about 8,000 Euros, which at that time were required for individual student migration (Schengenvisainfo 2019), entering the country as an au pair was the easiest way for him to be granted a visa. In contrast to Filip and Taras, who at the beginning of their au pair stay did not know that they would study in Germany, Alexander consciously instrumentalised the au pair stay as a stepping-stone to educational migration and had, at the time of the interview, already applied to 17 universities to make sure he would be accepted the following year.

This pragmatic attitude and his professional experience with care work helped him cope with the challenges of au pairing, because he was employed by a family, who used him illegally as a caregiver for their son with disabilities, when the mother, who usually did this, was at her gainful work.

> "The boy is disabled. He is nine years old [...] He has spasticity, he can neither talk nor walk, and he is not only physically but also mentally disabled. When he [comes] home from school around 5 pm I take care of him until the evening, well I feed him, I take him for a walk, I change diapers and so on and take him to bed [...] And also, it is my task to clean the whole house, well that is quite exhausting. [...] With regard to the practical work, you indeed do need a bit of [physical, CRA] strength, therefore the family wanted a male au pair. But apart from that it is ok. Well I am not this kind of person who starts to cry if I see disabled people."

Alexander reasoned that due to his physical strength, which is associated with being male, the family employed him. He had to learn how to change diapers: „It is not fun to me, but I perceive it as work". In his narrative, he did not discuss the meaning of the au pair stay as an intercultural experience but framed this phase as work. Alexander's case presents yet another form of "caring masculinity", because his tasks included the "dirty" part of housework and body hygiene that is often allocated to female workers (cf. Rohde 2014). It seems that in this case performing masculinity only implies the physical capability of nursing and not social activities with the child. In this narrative Alexander refers to the ableist notion that caring for disabled people is connected to charity resulting from pity or compassion. He negates any emotional involvement in the care

for this boy. Rather he interprets that he mainly provides practical and technical support for the boy, which requires physical strength. Focussing on these practical aspects of care allows Alexander to frame au pairing as a job that he instrumentalizes for his migration agency. He says that he agreed to these working conditions, because he negotiated with the au pair family that he would have two days off every weekend in order to travel to the city where his girlfriend studies. Even though regulations of the au pair program dictate that the au pair has to be granted at least 1,5 continuous days off and must not work more than 30 hours per week in total, Alexander's employer told him: "If you do your work well, of course you can take weekends of". This clearly indicates that the family, who did not offer any familial integration, treated Alexander as a low-waged employee.

My research on the exploitation of female au pairs by the au pair family revealed that these families legitimize their exploitation as offering welfare to an indigent person from a poor country (cf. Anderson 2007, 255ff). Hence, the female interviewees felt that their social status as academics from the Russian urban milieu is negated by the family's ignorance (Rohde-Abuba 2016). Alexander, too, encountered this attitude in his au pair family:

> "Well some people think, especially here in Germany, that Russia somehow is in the middle of nowhere. My guest mother asked me, when at Christmas we were sitting around the tree, if we have something like this in Russia. Well of course, we have something like this. And she also asked me so many questions which were like if there is really civilized life there [...] Even though I am not a great patriot this was really – I don't know – this was embarrassing for me. "

Despite the hard work and discrimination in the family, this situation certainly had the potential to lead Alexander onto a new path. Alexander stayed in this family for one year as he considered the au pair stay his only chance to enter into the German educational system. Two years after our interview he sent me a long email to report what had happened in the meantime. The email began with "everything [worked] out perfectly here as planned". He reported that he had started to study economic law and enjoyed it so much that he was considering enrolling in a master's degree after that. He ended his email stating the he hoped that my study would "hopefully show that most of the Russian au pairs use this wonderful opportunity of au pairing not only for travelling and partying but sensibly for their future."

Conclusion

In their biographical interviews, the men I spoke with used their au pair stay as an opportunity to leave home and escape a life course predetermined by unemployment and little access to highly skilled jobs. By au pairing, these young men established a phase of so-called emerging adulthood in their life course, which was uncommon in young people of their generation in post-socialist societies. The specific concept of the au pair stay, which allows the migration of young people without financial resources, enabled my interviewees to leave their parents' residence, gain financial, social and emotional independence and re-define themselves as adults. The analysis of these three cases reveals the importance of biographical moratoria for the development and realisation of biographical action schemes, which allow young people to step out of institutionalized life course patterns, distance themselves physically and emotionally from "important others" and experience new environments and relationships. Despite their unique experiences, what these man seem to have in common is their resilience, which has enabled them to endure adverse life conditions, transcend normativities and expectations and make use of their resources to enter into a life they have chosen for themselves.

While Schütze argues that migration marks the implementation of agency to overcome a pre-defined life course pattern, it has to be stated that in the precarious home contexts of these young men (temporary) emigration has already been established as a common strategy of making a living. However, their choice of au pairing as a highly feminized migration pathway illustrates their personal determination to change their life. Doing au pair work is necessary for their migration agenda, but the interviewed men do not define their masculinity through it. In contrast, the employers imposed their masculinity norms on them just through the allocation of tasks. While the analysis of three cases cannot make a claim to be a representative study, these three cases to some extent confirm while at the same time contradict key findings of the research on men in private and commercial care work. The interviewed men were hired explicitly because of their gender and thus gendered expectations of caring masculinity were imposed on them. This could indicate that the increasing demand for male au pairs does not represent the assimilation of gender roles in care, but rather the division of care work into "female tasks" and "male tasks". The analysis suggests that the fathers in the au pair families had failed to fulfil their designated tasks, so that the expectations of their participation in care were outsourced to an au pair. What is expected of the male au pair may vary between families, but the assumption that "male care" differs

from "female care" is consistent. The investigated cases suggest that not only practical care tasks are outsourced to employees but also the relational work of doing gender through familial care.

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