Article

Facebook Ethnography: The Poststructural Ontology of Transnational (Im) migration Research

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Abstract

This theoretical article discusses the creative utility of Facebook as a new ethnographic tool in which to study transnational (im) migration. Facebook ethnography allows the (im) migration researcher to transcend the four structural dualities that constrain transnational ethnographic research: (a) geographic constraints, (b) travel funding constraints, (c) travel time constraints, and (d) the logistical constraints of entrée into new ethnographic contexts. Facebook ethnography also allows the qualitative researcher to temporarily transcend the ontological structuralist dualities of traditional research methods, producing a new poststructural epistemological and ontological methodology.

Keywords: Facebook, ethnography, qualitative methods, (im) migration, poststructuralism

Who We Are

To begin, this team of writers consists of three authors. The first author is a fourth year assistant professor of sociology in a department of sociology and anthropology at a university in Colorado. For the last eight years, extending from a doctoral program to a full-time tenure-track position, this author's ethnographic research developed into a focus on transnational (im) migration concerned with the outward (em) migration flows from Mama, Yucatán, México. In line with Piacenti (2012), the reader will notice a new terminology throughout. The terms "migrant" and "immigrant" are overly-deterministic, structuralist dualities that perpetuate the myth of a purely national economy. (Im) migrants actively change their agendas while structural, economic, and political changes often warrant a change in these agendas. Since the respondents always have the potential to become either designation we use the term "(im) migrant" to capture the complete existential possibilities in the (im) migrant decision making processes. The majority of the (im) migrants are moving back and forth between Mama and US destination cities such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, Portland, and Kalamazoo. The second author is a fifth year assistant professor of English in Composition and Rhetoric Theory at the same university and is also the co-director of the university's College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP). CAMP assists first generation college students who come from seasonal, migrant farm worker families. The third author is a graduate student in anthropology with an interest in media and technology as tools for ethnographic methods.

In terms of a division of labour, the lead author is the only author who has been on the ground in Mama, Yucatán, México. The second author is providing editorial and theoretical guidance, as an expert on rhetorical identities with a focus on students from seasonal farmworker backgrounds. The third author's editorial assistance comes from an interest in computer-mediated storytelling and anthropological use of technology. All discussion of site use and face to face interactions are from the lead author, who has been living in Mama, Yucatán off and on, for nearly a decade (2005-present). The advantage of the three-layered writing team is that Facebook itself likely changes the lead author's perspective on the topic, so to combat this potential bias, the other two authors' more objective, yet focused, concern for this topic serves as an epistemological hinge that overcomes any strict subjective and objective interpretation of the topic.

Introduction to the Problem

As transnational (im) migration research develops over the life of an ethnographer's career, many if not all transnational (im) migration ethnographers experience frustration with the four dualistic, structural barriers of academia. These four structural barriers consist of: (a) geographic constraints, (b) travel funding constraints, (c) travel time constraints, and (d) the logistical constraints of entrée into new ethnographic contexts. What follows here is a discussion of *Facebook ethnography* as a new ethnographic method for researching transnational (im) migration; one that temporarily transcends the aforementioned structural barriers to transnational (im) migration research while creating a new, poststructural ontological and epistemological methodology, eliminating, at least temporarily, the dualistic constraints of past ethnographies. While this creates a common discourse that is not grounded in privileged positionality, Facebook creates a separation between receiver and producer of the text that allows for a different performative identity from each participant. This is, as Clegg Smith (2004) claims, similar to what Habermas (1987) conceived of with the theory of an "ideal speech situation."

Through the creation of a Facebook page called "Mamita, Yucatán," which was designed to focus on the social issues of transnational (im) migration from the town of Mama, Yucatán, México, we demonstrate a new type of ethnography and argue that Facebook can become a space for poststructural research connectivity and, as Clegg Smith (2004) states, "challenge existing

structures" (p. 223). This space allows "information, people, places, and other items to establish a variety of relationships that previous spaces or ideologies of space did not allow" (Rice, 2006, p. 128), therefore allowing for different degrees of social, political, and familial voices.

For our purposes here, we define transnational (im) migration as the process whereby (im) migrant actors, their families, and their communities engage a political, cultural, social, and economic landscape that is simultaneously embedded among local, national, and global relations.

A Poststructural Epistemology & Ontological Methodology: A Glimpse at the Literature

As contemporary ethnographers attempt to document transnational (im) migration, it is increasingly clear that the use of rapidly burgeoning technology is redefining, if not destroying, the singular concept of field. As an aspect of this reformation, what has come to light is that the methodological significance of using Facebook as a space for ethnography allows for the structuralist dualities of traditional, modern, scientific methods to be temporarily blurred, if not overcome. The traditional structuralist dualities of researcher-researched, observer-observed, object-subject, rational-irrational, freewill-determinism, and formal science-informal lifeworld can be weakened as the Facebook ethnographer attends to the multiple presences on the page by integrating professional and personal selves into a multi-hued, multi-textured arena of experience that temporarily transcends typical constraints of space and time in transnational research. Facebook can also place the researcher into a multiplicity of roles and identities while also eliminating at least some of the aforementioned structural barriers faced by ethnographers researching transnational (im) migration.

Previous research has underscored our claim to poststructural epistemology and ontology, with a focus on social networking sites in general, as well as on Facebook. Beneito-Montagut (2011) makes a distinction between virtual ethnographies, which may consist of observing gaming worlds such as Second Life or World of Warcraft, and "expanded ethnography," which consists of online experiences as expanded enhancements of real relationships. Beneito-Montagut (2011) states, "The term 'virtual ethnography' appears to be adequate only if the inquiry takes place in virtual worlds … but not if we inquire into everyday communications and interactions carried out online but in fact intrinsically linked to the face-to-face communications" (p. 719). We, too, make the same important distinction; here Facebook ethnography is a type of Beneito-Montagut's "expanded ethnography"—supplemental to the real interactions that come from real ethnographic site visits. That is to say, just like transnational (im) migrants or transnational towns themselves, the field becomes multi-sited. Beneito-Montagut (2011) goes on to finalize the distinction, claiming "[expanded ethnography] is expanded in the sense that the research strategy adopted is and necessarily has to be as complex as the object of study itself" (p. 725). Finally, and echoing our poststructural stance here, Beneito-Montagut (2011) says, "The researcher's role as observer and participant at the same time is essential in an expanded ethnography" (p. 728).

Looking more specifically at Facebook as one of many social networking sites, other researchers have also concluded that a blurring of dualistic structures is evident, although none has had an exact focus on transnational (im) migration research. Maranto and Barton (2010) see Facebook as a space that not only "privilege[s] a type of discourse based on the construction and representation of personal and shared identities" but also a place that "disregard[s] traditional cultural boundaries between private and public spheres" (p. 43). In other words, at times, the ethnographer becomes a kind of researched citizen and the researched citizen becomes, at times, a kind of ethnographer. At times the Facebook ethnographer is able to feel a transcended status much like the transnational (im) migrants under study. There is the ability to construct a kind of "presence" in the town, but from multiple places in the world—so long as there is an Internet

connection. With no clear beginning and no clear ending to demarcate the structuralist, dualistic experiential frame of the observer and the observed, an occasionally unsettling integration into the subject occurs—you become that which you study.

One of the more nuanced products of an unbundled dualistic structure is a kind of cohesion among previously-separated components of ethnographic research. In a methodological discussion worthy of note, Baker (2013) followed high school and university students in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland and asserts the claim that Facebook can simultaneously be three seemingly disparate things: a tool, a type of data, and a context of research. Baker (2013) claims Facebook is used

> (1) As a communicative medium (used to communicate with the participants across time and distance.
> (2) As data (including the participants' status updates, message contact, photos).
> (3) As context (a shared, observable space that fed into and framed data collection).
> (p. 135)

Looking at Facebook as a tool, or communicative medium, Baker (2013) alludes to the utility that is so important in the expanded ethnography of transnational (im) migration research; he states, "Facebook also helped to preserve established research relationships … [which] meant that as participants moved from where they were recruited (school/college) to their individual universities, the communication and occasions for observation were not lost" (p. 136). This same observation is central to our discussion; as (im) migrants recruited in Yucatán, San Francisco, Michigan, and Oregon are prone to internal migration as well as transnational (im) migration, using Facebook means social research ties are not lost because of a lack of forwarding addresses or changed cell phone providers.

Beyond the utility of Facebook emerges a new ontological field. Baker (2013) claims that Facebook provides "a platform for experimentation with various roles, particularly ones that may not be valued or recognised in their academic domains" (p. 139) and that "the 'traditional' dichotomy of what constitutes space (online-offline) is no longer clear-cut; it is now blurred as SNS [social networking sites], such as Facebook, cross the threshold from being purely online environments to having a tangible effect on the situated, offline lives of the users" (p. 141). We, too, agree that the distinction between friend and ethnographer becomes hazy, resulting in the potential for impact and influence on personal, social, and academic roles and identities.

The Event Horizon

This project began in 2007 with a chance encounter with an undergraduate student who was wearing a shirt that was less peculiar than most undergraduate apparel—the shirt said "Facebook me" on the front in large, blocked, and oversized letters. This curious message prompted an inquiry into the meaning of the message. It was casually explained that this was the "new big thing." The student went on to explain (not in these actual words) that it was a new website where you could connect with old friends and loved ones by becoming cyber-friends through a centralized cyberspace with compartmentalized pages for the development of personal, social networks.

Out of sociological curiosity, I accessed the site and created an account, but initially, little use of this new service (distraction?) was attempted—neither personally nor professionally. Later that year a family tragedy would prompt a reevaluation of this new tool. While performing (im) migration research in Mama, Yucatán a grandfather and a grandmother in Illinois and Indiana both passed

away within a week of each other. At the time of the two deaths, the town of Mama did not have Internet access, and so a two-hour van trip to a larger city once a week to check email was the best one could do to stay connected to friends and family in the US. As fate would have it, the lack of infrastructure would result in my missing one of the two funerals. This forced a reevaluation of my methods of contact to prevent any further emotional damage, which could potentially distract and derail dissertation research.

Shortly after this experience, the town of Mama began developing Internet infrastructure in order to support the burgeoning (em) migrant family population and their increasing need to cheaply and easily stay in contact with family in the US. Outward (em) migration began altering structures of meaning as transnational identities forced the town infrastructure to adapt and create what Appadurai (1996) calls a transnational *techno*scape, or that "the global configuration, also ever fluid, of technology, and the fact that technology, both high and low, both mechanical and informational, now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries" (p. 34).

In the meantime, increasing use of Facebook became a way to satisfy the demands of relationships and maintain contact with loved ones both in the US (when in Yucatán) and in Yucatán (when in the US). It soon became clear that chatting, posting status updates, and creating research photo albums for family and friends in both locales was transcending the typically cumbersome structural dualities of traditional, transnational ethnographic methods. What is more, as use of Facebook continued to transform the ethnographic research method, it became clear that the town of Mama was increasingly struggling to adapt to the economic, social, and cultural changes that came from the increase in movement of mostly, if not all, young men to-and-from the US.

A Blossoming Method

As these two distinct but interrelated phenomena merged, that of the researcher and the researched struggling with social change and geographic constraints, the ontogenesis moment of the idea emerged; create a second Facebook page, except this one would be for the town of Mama and would begin the era of the Facebook ethnography. The town Facebook site would be created as a way to serve the transnational research agenda as well as the town of Mama, by documenting the economic, social, and cultural impact of (em) migration from the town, as well as a space to post (im) migration related and relevant policy news for those interested in (im) migrant human rights issues. All of this would be possible in spite of my migrating from a visiting professorship at a major university in South Bend, Indiana to a small, elite liberal arts college in Richmond, Virginia, to a large public university in Denver, Colorado. What happened next was not entirely unexpected, but still, pleasantly surprising. It soon became apparent that through this new approach, the dualities of traditional ethnographic procedures were being at least temporarily dissolved as a new epistemological and ontological methodology emerged.

As this methodological transformation continued a shift from casually "friending" Mama's (im) migrants and (im) migrant family members, "friending" as many of the citizenry of the town that would accept a "solicitud de amistad" became the obvious next step. As this transnational network expanded from Mama to the US, broader linkages to other nearby towns in Yucatán were automatically created by the algorithms that Facebook uses to connect people with loose connections and common friends. Other nearby towns that also share the experience of outward (em) migration quickly extended the contextual parameters of the ethnography. Now citizens from Mama that live in other locales such as Mexico City or New York City, whom could not be studied due to structural constraints, became involved. Through use of the town Facebook site,

Mama's citizenry also began blurring the lines between being passive respondents and co-administrators of the site, as they dedicated site information and content to self-identified (im) migration issues and town concerns. And so together, *we* created a Facebook page for the town which focuses on (im) migrant rights, concerns, and (im) migration policy updates (though the site, like any other Facebook page, can be occasionally "polluted" with unrelated and off-topic posts and pictures).

As the page developed, other friends (ethnographers?) on the town page began shifting and morphing from previous identities such as "family" and "friend" to identities such as "assistant" and "researcher"; almost effortlessly we shape-shifted from research business to news and gossip, from formal interview to small talk, from social surveyors to soccer fans, and so on. For example, a personal friend in Mama, who also occasionally works as our research assistant in Mama, posted pictures of a recent birthday party. As the photo album was posted we began chatting, getting the most recent town news. As the conversation unfolded we began migrating towards the topic of research business. We discussed the coming special election in January and how that would determine the viability of creating a bi-national internship program in summer 2013. He stated that he would go ahead and talk to both potential winning candidates and get the process underway, quickly transitioning from researcher to friend and wishing me a good fall semester. He then finished the conversation by saying that he would send "saludos" (greetings/best wishes) to all of our friends and family in Mama, and that he would see me in-person "soon enough."

In the example above, a citizen of Mama and friend of Mama's Facebook town page shared in and built a context of meaning, playing many if not all of these same roles and identities that researchers play, but also setting the tone of the discourse at leisure. In this case the scientific observer of "structuralist pasts" is also simultaneously the observed as the systematic gaze of science is reciprocally penetrated by the informal gaze of the citizenry in a new, globalized and transnational lifeworld. In this process, each context is mutually affected. We learn about current news in town politics while s/he learns of our university's missions, including internship programming.

Situated within the milieu of sociological and anthropological theory, it is clear that using Facebook creates a potential new epistemological and ontological methodology. Rather than the duality of structuralism that stems from the traditional constructs of the national-international, researcher-researched, and object-subject experience, it became obvious that a poststructural experience was emerging. Dualities were blurred, if not temporarily breached, and soon disoriented by the de-anchored co-presence of multiple, transnational roles and identities. Although the Mama, Yucatán Facebook page was used as a space to focus on (im) migration issues and human rights policy, it quite unexpectedly allowed for a new social relationship marked by a more flattened hierarchy of statuses between the town citizenry and academia while allowing for a more democratic approach to information production and dissemination, as well as shifts in roles, identities, and purposes.

In a semi-structured process, the site was visited as least three times per week in order to post (im) migration related news articles, respond to commentaries made to articles or posts, check messages in ongoing conversations, respond to new friend requests, and maintain the site. At times, I would inhabit the site for hours at a time, while at other times only for a few minutes. This was partly a function of my checking-in on the site at all hours of the day and on different days. Part of the site maintenance was also to remove non-(im) migration related content that was posted, or inappropriate content. Censorship was kept to a minimum. In all, less than five (im) migrant interviews took place through Facebook, although some supplementary follow-up questions to face to face interviews performed in Mama, Kalamazoo, and San Francisco were also

performed. Since Facebook actively suggests common friends to connect to mutual friends, the timeframe of the page's inception and a healthy, burgeoning online page community was short. Once the page was created, I began friending townspeople, those whom I was already friends with on my own personal Facebook page, and whom I knew were transnational (im) migrants from Mama. Within three months there were more than several hundred participants, some of which stayed, while others defriended. That is to say, the community is ever-evolving much like the citizenry of a town with inward and outward moving transnational (im) migrants.

By engaging the town page and contributing to the discourse concerned with the impact of (im) migration and globalization on the town, the researcher and the researched become unified under the auspices of our art and discipline—we become that which we study: those which are our research are also researching us, and can temporarily transcend the duality of object and subject in a poststructuralist ontological sense.

Geographic Constraints?: The Spatial Omnipresence of Facebook Ethnography

The first of the four dualities is geographic constraints. As the experiment with this new tool continued, the worth of its application in transnational (im) migration research became more readily apparent. Facebook ethnography not only helped alleviate the anxieties of loved-ones in the US while in the field in Yucatán, but also alleviated the anxieties of loved-ones in Yucatán while in the field in the US. The same also holds true for the (im) migrants of Mama and their families, and is one of the principle reasons they use Facebook while abroad. This observation comes from countless conversations with families and friends both in the US and in Mama, Yucatán, as well as from direct experiences by the author. While this is by no means a claim that all (im) migrants use Facebook for this reason, it is clearly a way to stay in consistent contact and reflects the emotional labour required to endure the (im) migration process. Prior to Facebook and other social networking applications, long distance calling cards and occasional phone calls were the standard lifeline. Today, the multi-faceted content and data found online augments the phone call through Skyping, messaging, and Internet memes that serve to reproduce and signify culture through images, humour, news, and discussion. Clearly, transnational (im) migrants are using the technology in this way and to their advantage. For the transnational traveler, regardless of purpose, this feeling of "not quite belonging" or uneasiness can exist in all locations as a kind of transnational "exile." We draw on the work of Edward Said's (2000) *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* in order to frame the idea of exile. Facebook, therefore, has the potential to decrease, if only temporarily, the feeling of geographic exile or alienation that both researchers and (im) migrants come to feel. Clearly a phone call does this too, but Facebook does this differently, providing context through multiple-messaging, images, music, video, humour, and commonly-understood cultural cues via Internet memes. In this way, the dualistic national-international frame can be temporarily reduced by a web-based, geographic co-presence.

In transcending geographical constraints, we come to the point of being partially unchained from the deterministic anchors of immediate place and space. The physical position of our bodies can now be transcended by the spatial reach of our computer-generated words, creating an existential omnipresence indicative of the world's cosmopolitan elite. Thomas Friedman's (2005) statement about the world being *flat* is understandable from the perspective of any researcher engaged with (im) migration and globalization. However, it is clear that this statement must be dissected along class lines. The world *is much flatter* for the upper class cosmopolitan elite, but the world is also *much rounder* for the lower classes—it is more geographically determining. Although (im) migration researchers are relatively affluent from a global perspective, structural barriers still exist. However, Facebook is able to lessen this barrier and allow the researcher and the researched to transcend the geographic barriers faced by even the most cosmopolitan of elites.

In sum, the first of the four common barriers to transnational (im) migration ethnography, the mountainous geographic determinism of a round world can be relatively flattened to a mere speed bump in the multi-directional *techno*scape of transnational streams of thought. The structural duality of national-foreigner is brought partially to ground by the co-presence, if not omnipresence, of a flattened ethnographic field, conducive to studying transnational (im) migration from all places in a unified cyberspace.

Travel Funding Constraints?: The Freedom of Facebook Ethnography

As transnational (im) migration researchers know, spending countless hours every year completing internal and external research grant proposals are a necessary evil. However, this same sword on which ethnographers must fall is also the giver of life in terms of professional development, especially during the tenure process. Although quantitative researchers are able to transcend some of these issues by collecting publicly-available secondary data sets and performing statistical analyses on campus or even at home, qualitative ethnographers, especially in the field of transnational (im) migration, are subjected to a variety of prohibitive economic barriers. These barriers include but are not limited to passport and visa costs, airfare and ground transportation costs, food costs in the field, housing, luggage fees, escalating fuel prices, and at times and depending on location, extortion and bribery by public officials, and shrinking and tenuous budgets doled out by seemingly unsympathetic administrations and their out-of-touch boards of trustees.

As we continue to refine our use of Facebook the flexibilization of our labour allows for the circumventing of some of these economic barriers. For example, several semi-structured interviews with (im) migrant respondents who had to cancel their interviews in Yucatán were still successfully performed by sending them the interview schedule as an attachment through Facebook and meeting online to chat about the topic of (im) migration and cultural change. By utilizing the Facebook chat function in order to continue the semi-structured interview with follow-up questions while in Denver, Colorado, a special trip to Yucatán to complete the interview was successfully avoided. And so the ownership of my funding, which in the past was framed by the structuralist duality of employer-employee relations, is now liberated to the less funding-constrained transnational *econo*scape (Appadurai, 1996).

As a caveat to this transcendence of economic constraints, we wish to claim, wholeheartedly, that by no means are we suggesting that administrators should further cut budgets for professional development and fieldwork due to Facebook's ability to allow the researcher to "telecommute research." Rather, we suggest that this form of ethnography operates as supplement to and in enhancement of traditionally funded approaches and qualitative techniques. At the end of the day, there is no substitute for being there, in person, in the face-to-face field; however, our claim here is that the ethnographic field of Facebook provides an invaluable amplification of that traditionally-demarcated field-space.

Lastly, there is an economic sidebar worth mentioning here, as it relates to the future of publishing qualitative anthropology and sociology. As academia continues to be transformed by the Internet and social networking sites, real pressure will continue to be applied to the publication process. Online content will be the rule, not the exception, as greener, faster, and more shareable information storage takes deeper root. Seeing this fact years ago, Howard (1988) prophetically claimed, "The cost of storing information electronically is thus plummeting at the very time that the costs of publishing books are skyrocketing. Isn't it time that we as anthropologists reflect on the implication of these material facts?" (p. 306). Yes, it is.

Travel Time Constraints?: The Endless Summer of Facebook Ethnography

Anyone who has engaged in transnational (im) migration research knows the reality of the "fieldwork clock." Our fieldwork season runs from the end of May until mid-August, with a short season from mid-December to early January and during a coveted and glorious sabbatical. The frustration of only being in the field three months out of the year also adds up in terms of lost productivity, stagnating and collapsing projects, delayed publications, and denied raises and denied tenure—all of which contribute to a lack of stability for the researcher and his or her parent institution.

Investing time in a Facebook ethnography liberates one from the short (im) migration ethnographer seasons. No longer racing to complete projects in a few months, research runs year round with casual, daily pop-ins to the Facebook page to view and make comments, as the examples above demonstrate. Scheduling formal and informal meetings, collecting surveys, debating (im) migration policy, posting (im) migration-focused news stories, and gauging the mood of the town all become a part of daily life by dropping-in on the website. So now the structuralist duality of in-season and out-of season falls to the wayside as this new ethnographer can realize a type of supplemental productivity by the annual calendar, not the academic calendar.

Logistical Constraints?: Getting In & Never Needing to Get Out

One of the primary tasks that every ethnographer faces is how to identify a context of study. However, once a context of study is identified, what can be more laborious is getting in to that context for a closer, more nuanced and examined look around. This can entail hand-shaking at town halls and governmental buildings, homes, cornfields, ranches, fishing boats, agencies, companies, schools, bars, and restaurants. In traditional ethnography, especially transnational ethnography, it can take months if not years to establish entrée and meaningful rapport in a research context. What is more, entrée into a town does not necessarily mean you have achieved the more profound access that comes from being invited to homes, weddings, birthday parties, funerals, and semi-restricted contexts of schools or governmental buildings.

Getting "completely in" to an ethnographic context is a process that is unfolding, folds-up and collapses, snowballs, stagnates, moves in stammers, stutters, and false starts, and generally lurches somewhat uncontrollably into new, previously-compartmentalized spaces. For example, through a Facebook contact, research space in Mama was recently secured from the local town government who had just elected a new mayor. Since every three years there is a new town administration, re-securing the right to perform ethnographic work must be reestablished. This was achieved through a simple friending and personal yet professional message explaining the current project and how it might benefit both the town and the record of the mayor's administration. From this came a friending and therefore a connection with the local director of the town *secundaria* (high school) in order to establish a deeper applied sociological agenda concerning the research on young (all) male (em) migrants. This concluded with the introduction of current (im) migration research into the high school curriculum. What is more, a recent publication on the town had just been translated into Yucatec-Mayan (the local primary, indigenous language), and was able to be sent directly to the high school principal for use in the social studies classroom. Through Facebook site conversations, the principal and the (im) migration research team concluded that the translation would be beneficial in training the students to read and write Yucatec-Mayan while also giving the near-(em) migrant-aged students a more sobering look at (im) migration realities than what they typically received from the mostly sanitized "success tales" of friends who had returned from work stints in the US. We also realized that Facebook itself was a great venue in which to practice writing and reading the Yucatec-Mayan language, and so the site has developed a secondary

function in this capacity, teaching Yucatec-Mayan as well as allowing the youth to "play" with the language and allowing Yucatec to grow and morph as any other e-language does online, worldwide.

Through Facebook the dualistic structuralism of getting in and getting out, of being insider and outsider, is replaced by the poststructuralist Facebook ethnographer who gets in but *never* has to get out—they can be "in" 365 days per year—a new kind of ontology. This blurring of lines among a variety of roles and identities—friend, ethnographer, outsider, insider, national, and foreigner—are never stable, but rather momentous, tenuous, and incomplete. As this article is being written, toggling back and forth from window to window, chatting with the people on the town site from a couch in Denver—true multitasking and the assuming of many ontological roles happens simultaneously.

As a follow-up to the previously-mentioned negotiations over the creation of a summer internship program in Mama, Yucatán for undergraduate students, we have been successful in laying the foundation for this program through our assistant in Mama relaying our program vision to the new mayor. The new mayor has embraced the program vision, which has effectively eliminated the concern of not knowing if the administration would require a face-to-face visit in which to pitch the program. What is more, the mayor is now using the program as a talking point for their development agenda, framing it as an important and valuable form of infrastructural development that will be implemented in time. Not only has the foundation of the internship program been developed solely through Facebook, but the relative cost of and time consumed in getting the program operational and "online" has been greatly curbed. Now there is no need to make a special trip to Yucatán over winter break, but rather we will arrive in summer 2014 and again in January 2015, with much of the groundwork completed.

Wait—What?!? Never Getting Out?!?: Ethical Concerns and Ontological Drawbacks

We would be remiss if we did not address the ethical concerns of this endeavor, for they are as expansive as they are murky—a completely grey area seems to be the function and possibly the dysfunction of the new ontology we propose. As Wilson and Peterson (2002) rightly suggest, "Within this environment of change, however, we are also in a moment in which the ethical responsibilities of the researcher are far from clear" (p. 461). The realization that the ethical responsibilities of the researcher are unclear is, again, a perfect reflection of our argument, as researcher and researched become fused at times, while at other times there are role reversals and intermingling of roles. This, however, should not be a source of concern or cause for alarm, resulting in increases in institutional review board (IRB) control. Rather, IRBs should be focusing on how to be most responsive to this dynamic fluidity in the ontological relationships in social networking sites.

We have chosen not to provide exact empirical data because the page was not created in order to collect individual or even community-level data. Rather, what we have done here is to consider the site meta-theoretically and methodologically, rather than focus on the potential misuse of individual participant contributions to the site. We privilege a discussion of the perpetual, decentered gestalt shift over exact empirical analysis. In other words, we are not attempting to elaborate on how to use Facebook to collect and analyze data, (that could happen in a myriad of ways) but rather to imagine the methodological implications of a Facebook ethnography.

We believe that our use of Facebook is in-line with the American Sociological Association and American Anthropological Association's ethical codes; however, we also acknowledge that these codes and standards become murky in Facebook ethnography—this is, in fact, our main

argument; that Facebook ethnography creates a poststructural transcendence of traditional academic dualities of researcher and researched. By refraining from individual data analysis, or even an exact group analysis, which was never the rationale for the creation of the page, we are still demonstrating respect and maintaining the dignity of the participants. We are also attempting to protect the best interests of the citizenry, or practicing beneficence, just as we would in a face-to-face ethnographic approach.

Certainly Mama is still increasing its technological literacy as it negotiates its place within the process of global (im) migration, but the town has gone from no Internet service in 2005 to multiple cybercafés and rapidly burgeoning Internet literacies in 2014—hierarchies of power, infrastructural access, and individual computer skills are, then, increasing in the town, flattening the traditional hierarchy of researcher and researched, as the unique individuals involved are always undulating, always changing in technological skills and computer literacy. Drawing on Denzin (2004), it must be assumed that the town of Mama, just as academia, is a "moral community that is ontologically prior to the person" (p. 6). In this case, the persons are the town citizenry engaged in the Facebook page as well as the researcher, meaning that we should expect that all activity on the Facebook site would already be under the auspices of existing social and moral constructs of the town. In other words, we as researchers should assume the same ethics online as we would in-person, on the ground, and in the traditional field. That is, our approach is akin to the approach of Clegg Smith (2004), who claims that the ethics are grounded in the assumption that the participants understand the answer to the following question: [Are the interactions] "Personal? Yes. Private? No" (p. 230).

In their analysis of Facebook and ethics, Light and McGrath (2010) raise ethical concerns related to "privacy, security and identity arising out of the processes of creating and maintaining profiles, publicizing activity and the way that these data may be interpreted" (p. 301). However, the fluid instability of Facebook allows participants to add friends and "like" pages as well as defriend and "unlike" pages through their own freewill. Once the site is created, it takes on a life and power of its own. No one is required to take part, stay in, or even to engage others on the site. Because of this, your typical ethnographic ethics are largely incongruent as concerns over security, privacy, and identity are largely owned by each participant and is assumed to be a reflection of their own cost-benefit analysis of participation. This is assumed to be understood (although in varying degrees) by all parties freely-interacting on the Facebook site. More importantly, and as Zimmer (2010) also confronts, it is virtually impossible for us to know the unique privacy settings of each participant of the Mama, Yucatán site. Since participants come and go, and because they can change their personal privacy settings at will and at any time, no one IRB protocol could possibly operate as a "permanent one size fits all" protocol for all site participants.

In the past, the creative research process was determined by the ontological and epistemological constraints of institutional and geographic barriers. However, the ability to differentiate between the private and public self allows for a necessary buffering of selves, identities, and roles—we are speaking of privacy. Indeed, as early as 2002, Wilson and Peterson (2002) state "An online/offline conceptual dichotomy is … counter to the direction taken within recent anthropology, which acknowledges the multiple identities and negotiated roles individuals have within different sociopolitical and cultural contexts" (p. 456). Because of this, the Facebook ethnographer faces a potential dilemma in that the poststructural breaching of conventional dualistic denominations of spatially-constrained ethnography may be cause for existential concern. Have we now constructed a situation where it is unmanageable and not agreeable to be found, tracked, and turned into ethnographers when we are supposed to be off the clock? We must be careful not to lose our freedom to be off the clock by our new freedom to be on the clock. Although the line between the personal and the professional are now more blurred than ever, we

must be level-headed and understand that the new pragmatic convention of Facebook ethnography must be tempered with wisdom and appropriate restraint—but let the experiment continue.

Conclusion: "Ethnographer Me—I'm a Friend."

As we finish this letter from the ethnographic cyberfield, we are cognizant that during Facebook interactions with the citizenry in Mama, Yucatán, it is not at all clear if we are being "friended" as ethnographers or if we are being "ethnographered" as friends. The identity lines are blurred as we co-exist within a continuum comprised of identities as town citizens, academics, friends, and family members, between personal identity and vocation. By blending these identities we can temporarily transcend the past logistical issues entailed in performing transnational (im) migration ethnography. Realizing that we can go into the cyberfield at any time, and as we write this, actually multitask by toggling back and forth with the town Facebook page in question, we are on the cutting edge of whole new worlds of possibilities. Foreseeing this future, which we here describe in the present, Wilson and Peterson (2002) describe online spaces as "places where an individual could take on multiple identities in ways never before possible and indeed bring about changes in conventional notions of identity itself" (p. 457). So, while initially creating the page to stay in touch—post-personal family tragedy, we now toggle back and forth in order to study (im) migration—from the *new universal field*; the field that now exists in a house, an office, or a coffee shop in Denver—or perhaps in a coffee shop in Yucatán, México.

Afterward: Policy Recommendations and Social Justice

In terms of policy recommendations and social justice, we have expanded our Facebook activities to include actively recruiting new respondents as well as "friending" and "liking" local agencies and governmental entities in order to keep current on (im) migration policy and programs. For example, through the Mama town page, we have friended the Mexican Federal Government's *Tres por Uno* (3 x 1) program. This program consists of federal, state, and municipal governments matching "3 for 1" each remittance dollar sent back to México from abroad; that is, one dollar matched at the federal level, one at the state level, and one at the municipal level. Our action proved important, as many (em) migrants were not aware of the program until seeing the 3 x 1 posts through the town Facebook site.

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