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**CONNECTED, BUT TO WHAT? A CASE STUDY OF NEW MEDIA, MIGRATION,
AND TRANSNATIONAL BELONGING IN GLOBAL PARIS**

A Dissertation in

Mass Communications

by

Erika Polson

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The dissertation of Erika Polson was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Dennis K. Davis
Professor of Communications
Dissertation Adviser
Co-Chair of Committee

C. Michael Elavsky
Assistant Professor of Communications
Co-Chair of Committee

Matthew Jordan
Assistant Professor of Communications

Mrinalini Sinha
Professor of History and Women's Studies

John Spicer Nichols
Professor of Communications
Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and Research

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School.

ABSTRACT

Arjun Appadurai (1996) locates cross-border migrations of *people* and *media* as the ‘core’ of globalization’s complex connectedness. Scholarship at this core has shown that questions of belonging and identity can be closely related to media practices, and that media-production by people living outside of an originating ‘homeland’ involves strategic and multivalent processes that can lead to new ‘hybrid’ and transnational identities. However, in the large body of work that has developed at this nexus, a burgeoning group of migrants is almost completely omitted: middle class migrants who, whether as corporate professionals or cultural experience-seekers, or both, go from global city to global city, remaining just a few years in each site and weaving complicated social networks along the way. These people are unique to studies of migration because they are not a bounded ‘population’ group, are from ethnically and nationally diverse backgrounds, and their movements are characterized by *continual* migration. Such characteristics are outside the boundaries of traditional research conceptions that categorize migrants by ethnic, religious or national/regional heritage and often imagine a more stable and linear migration wherein people migrate from ‘country A’ to ‘country B’ to put down roots in the new land, even while continuing the connections to the homeland or with a Diaspora.

This ethnographic dissertation takes the ‘global city’ of Paris as a case study, to interpret how a population of ‘international people’ comes together through combined use of online and offline mediated spaces. By accessing web-based groups such as those hosted by ‘meet-up.com,’ it’s possible to move to Paris, not know anybody, and have a social event to go to almost every night of the week. While certainly many people arrive in a foreign city and immediately immerse themselves in the local cohort of their co-nationals, this study

focused on those who specifically sought to become a part of a broader ‘international community,’ by joining web groups thus-named. In the introduction to a collection of essays on contested identities, Caldas-Couthard & Iedema (2008) write: ‘For the deterritorialized self, social coherence is pursued through more and more intense and dynamic forms of communication, seeking to create and recreate a sense of interactive place, however temporary’ (p. 2). My project analyzes a portal to that temporary community, where the floating self can touch down in a space of belonging

Critical studies of migration and media have focused on important efforts to ‘provide a voice’ to marginalized migrant groups, but most have not taken into account the large and increasingly ethnically diverse population of middle class migrants *also* moving in transnational space. That privileged migrants remain ‘under the radar’ attests to the naturalized status of ‘elites’ both in academic and public discourse, a practice that overlooks an opportunity to develop new and broader frameworks for understanding social changes accompanying increased geographic mobility and the role of media use herein. Interestingly, my interpretations of the Paris international community did not indicate that its participants were ‘elite’ but rather that they were mainly middle class migrating people whose cultural capital (knowledge of several languages, repertoire of ‘experiences’ abroad, etc.) allowed them to demonstrate a certain ‘elite-ness’ that was not materially based.

By contributing a new perspective on how new communications technologies shape and are shaped by social practices developed in the transnational spaces of globalization, as well as uncovering modes of belonging, experience, and practice that, while crossing previously-imagined boundaries, are also erecting new ones, this project provides broader understanding of the actual practices that make up a ‘global network society.’

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Chapter One

Introduction

Which new modes of life are coming into being where the old ones, ordained by religion, tradition or the state, are breaking down?

- Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 2002

For the deterritorialized self, social coherence is pursued through more and more intense and dynamic forms of communication, seeking to create and recreate a sense of interactive place, however temporary.

- Caldas-Coulthard & Iedema, *Identity Trouble*, 2008

Make the world your home.

- InterNations.org

The world is ‘on the move,’ with at least 191 million people currently accounted for as living outside their country of birth (UNFPA, 2006). Chroniclers of globalization processes have focused a great deal of attention on this increase in cross-border migrations – a phenomenon linked to electronic media both in terms of inspiring movement and enabling new forms of living, being, and identifying beyond an originating homeland (e.g. Appadurai 1996; Georgiou 2006; Mazzarella 2004; Morley & Robins 1995). However, subjects of study are typically imagined as whole ‘populations’ defined, for example, by religious (e.g. ‘Muslim’ [Hirji 2006]), gender (‘women migrants’ [Kennedy 2005; UNFPA 2006]), or national identity (e.g. ‘Turks in Germany’ [Kosnick 2007]).

At the same time, theoretical models created to describe new modes of association in today’s social order, such as the ‘network society’ (Van Dijk, J. 2006), portray a world characterized by increasing *individualism* and *detachment* from belonging to communities or

populations. This project makes a contribution towards reconciling that gap, by looking at how and why certain migrating individuals organize online in order to come together as a population of ‘international people’, however temporarily, in offline space.

This turns out to be a story about migrations of many kinds, driven by many reasons, and undertaken by people who often have little in common. It’s a story about disparate lives that intersect in spaces infused by the global and the local, the online and the offline, the fleeting and the ritualistic. Two common elements unite the protagonists of this narrative and provide the nexus for this ethnographic inquiry: First, at the time of the study, participants were residing in Paris, France; Second, there they utilized *online* forums to join *offline* social gatherings of people with whom they could presume to share a certain outlook or lifestyle based on a range of global mobilities, from corporate expatriate to exchange student to foreign spouse to globally-wandering artist/author/etc to more. The following work is an account of my participant-observation of integrated online/offline efforts to create an ‘international community’ in Paris – the site of a particular case study situated in its local context as well as in a broader network of ‘global cities.’

Situating the Ethnographic Research (and Researcher)

I come to this topic as a doctoral student of global communications and a frequent international traveler who has lived abroad on more than one occasion, and my interest in and construction of the ethnographic field has been informed by both these personal and professional experiences. While becoming familiar with the large body of interdisciplinary work on media, migration, and identity/belonging, I was stuck by a missing link made apparent from my own previous experiences with temporary migration, and as a member of

social circles that included temporary migrants from a range of countries. In both my own case and the case of my ‘foreign’ friends, I had witnessed proactive attempts to create groups oriented away from particular nationalities and toward national diversity. A typical recounting of a dinner party, for example, would include emphatic reference to the fact that the people attending were ‘from all over the world.’ I also noted that many of us had had multiple migration experiences and would continue to do so in our futures – trajectories were a mix of stints at ‘home’ and abroad, with sometimes very open-ended temporal and geographical plans.

As I began to study media and especially ‘new media’ in relation to identities and connections among migrating people in the context of globalization, I wondered where such ‘types’ would fit. How would migrating individuals forming community around interests or commonalities other than national ‘roots’ be conceived? Could such a ‘group’ be considered in relation to the body of research on ‘new media’ and migration, and if so, how? At the same time, familiarizing myself with the rich variety of research into the communications networks of groups said to be conducting ‘globalization from below’ (Della Porta 2006), I became uncomfortably aware of my own cavalier attitude toward both the geopolitical logistics and philosophical nature of my cosmopolitan mobility, and the class implications of my questions. What began as a personal and self-reflexive reaction to reading study after study of the media uses of unprivileged migrants, later developed into a scholarly interest in how the strategic, creative, and constitutive practices of these groups were probed in every way

while practices of privileged migrants remained for the most part opaque – referred to mainly with vague nods to the lifestyles of ‘elites’¹.

Thus my research evolved in response to what I saw as two over-arching gaps in media and migration literature. First, that despite the *implications* of post-national or other post-modern forms of attachment that underlie much of the research on media and migration, the majority of studies continued to focus on national or other bounded ‘population’ groups living in foreign lands. While certainly many people arrive in a foreign city and immediately immerse themselves in the local cohort of their co-nationals, many others also seek to become a part of a broader ‘international community.’ Because such collectives are purposely constituted to comprise ‘diversity’, and because they are mostly made up of people who, through their mobile lifestyle/careers, make *multiple* moves to new international destinations, they remain outside the boundaries of research conceptions that categorize migrants by ethnic, religious or national/regional origins and often imagine a more stable and linear migration wherein people migrate from ‘country A’ to ‘country B’ to put down roots in the new land, even while continuing the connections to the homeland or with an exterritorial, or Diasporic, community.

Second, in the general body of research on migration and media, expatriates and other privileged migrants have not attracted intense focus. It could be that researchers are drawn to counteract the dearth of meaningful discussion about the lives of unprivileged migrants in public discourse by focusing overwhelming on these groups in academic work. Indeed, important work has been done to address or highlight issues of unprivileged migrant groups and their media, particularly in relation to efforts to shape public policies to reflect the needs

¹At the same time, while they clearly are advantaged in relation to a global field of comparison, it will be noted herein that privileged migrants come from a range of class backgrounds that cannot be adequately described by the overall term ‘elite.’

of new populations (e.g. Camauer 2003; d'Haenens 2004; Kosnick 2007). On the other hand, another perspective would suggest that this body of research has perpetuated the tendency noted in scholars to naturalize the position of the researcher while considering many aspects of 'others,' and particularly the poor, open for scrutiny.

Anthropologist Anne-Meike Fechter (2007) claims that researchers have historically had an aversion to 'studying up' – an assessment that echoes critiques made by Marcus and Clifford (1986), and which led to a call for researchers to study their own 'back yard'. Despite such calls, Fechter points out that very little such work has been done, particularly in relation to migrating populations. However, expanding empirical understanding of the experiences of migrating peoples at all levels of the socio-economic spectrum can help to paint a more holistic picture of meaning and action at the nexus of migration and media. Heightened global migration should be seen as a process in which those moving at the privileged 'top' and those conducting 'transnationalism from below' are a part of the same ecology.

I undertook to create a study addressing both of these gaps, where I myself would be situated as both a participant and observer in a group that was, at least figuratively, in my own backyard. To thoroughly situate myself as a 'native' participant, I decided to focus on a city where I, too, would be a foreigner. I chose Paris for various reasons: As a global city and an historic center for discourse on cosmopolitanism, it was easy to imagine I would find the types of people for whom I was searching; I also had a few friends in Paris whom I knew I could count on to help with logistics while I got started with the research; And frankly, this project seemed a great opportunity to spend time in what I had always imagined as one of the

great cities of the world². To begin, I had to confront the dilemma that if this ‘group’ of people were not organized around a previously defined categorical identity (e.g. nationality), how would I find them? The answer turned out to be serendipitously connected to both my subject and object of study: I found ‘them’ the same way they find each other – on the Internet.

The purpose of the rest of this chapter is to introduce how the ethnographic ‘sites’ were located on the Internet; provide a snapshot of the literature linking media and processes of globalization and belonging; present an overview of the people served by these sites; and describe key questions this dissertation hopes to address and how the rest of the document is organized chapter-by-chapter to address those issues.

Portal to ‘The International Community’ of Paris

Moving abroad? No friends or connections? No problem! A person with online access and know-how may use the Internet to access a ready-made social scene in the new country. In fact, there is now such a proliferation of websites specializing in using the online format to bring strangers together in the offline world, it is possible to move to a new city, not know anybody, and have an event to attend your very first night in town. While groups organize around a range of commonalities, such as broad religious affiliation (e.g. ‘Paris Bible Study’), hobbies and interests (e.g. ‘Paris Bargain Hunters’ or ‘Paris Museum Lovers’), or even food (e.g. ‘Vegetarians in Paris’), I focused my search exclusively on those organized around a broader cosmopolitan collectivity.

² I make this aspect explicit in order to remind myself and my readers that often desire and imagination inform research choices, and indeed, in many ways the ability to make such lifestyle/preference-related choices situates me in common with many (although not all) of the subjects of this study.

The web-based groups I selected to study all claimed to provide a link to an offline community open to a wide range of people who, for one reason or another, don't belong to Paris – whether because they are 'New-in-Town', 'Expatriates', 'International People', or 'Global Nomads'. I assumed that by joining these, members were at least *open* to building – or were even seeking – connections beyond their national groups³.

I spent six months visiting seven of these websites on a regular basis as an observer. During the latter half of that time, I also spent three months in Paris as a 'participant', which involved filling out a profile on the sites, receiving email news and notifications from the groups, participating in correspondence with other members, as well as attending offline group events on a regular basis. I studied: 'The Paris New-in-Town MeetUp'; 'Expats Paris'; 'INC/The International Nomad Community'; and 'International Events in Paris' – all hosted on the global/local website, Meetup.com – as well as three independent sites: 'Kunveno.com' ("For internationally-minded people"), 'Internations.org' ("Connecting global minds") and 'Horn's Social Agenda' (for "Cosmopolitan professionals and like-minded individuals"). Although the format of the websites is reminiscent of the social networking genre, they differ somewhat in that these are not *virtual* communities. In every case, the stated goal is to bring members together in *Face-to-Face* events⁴. In fact, MeetUp.com's running headline is "World's largest community of local Meetups, clubs and groups!" and the accompanying tagline reads, "Real groups make a real difference."⁵ So, while the sites have the feel of a

³ There are also many active "nationals abroad"-type organizations in Paris. For example, the Paris pages of the portal, MeetUp.com host groups such as: Expat Russians, Expat Spanish, The 'rendez vous Indien, The Paris Brit Meetup Group, and The Paris Expat Singaporeans Meetup Group, etc.

⁴ Internations.org is a variation in that it combines a global 'virtual community' with a local tab that hosts a local forum, publicizes events happening in the area, and assembles profiles of members living in the same city.

⁵ A new running head now reads, 'Use the Internet to get off the Internet!' and the tagline is 'Maybe it's time for a little less face-to-screen and a little more face-to-face.'

‘virtual community’ with member profiles, forums, photographs, and other trappings of social networking sites, their stated purpose is to create *offline* socializing and relationships.

As referenced in the Caldas-Coulthard & Iedema quote at the top of this chapter, these websites provide the portal to a temporary community, where the mobile self can touch down in a space of belonging. Exactly what *type* of offline community will be found is made very explicit: all of the websites contain repeated references, made by founders and members alike, to ‘the international community’ of Paris. But what is the nature of that community? Who belongs (and who is excluded)? How is it constituted and what sort of comfort does it provide? What unites members and what is their commitment to the community? And how do these relationships relate to bigger questions such as those posed by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim at the top of the chapter: Which new modes of life are coming into being where the old ones, ordained by religion, tradition or the state, are breaking down? These are among the questions that I set out to explore as I entered Paris’ international community.

Globalization and Media

The celebrated mantra of globalization is that the world is getting smaller, connecting all of us. Scholarship on ‘new media’ has been intensely focused on what the new connectivity means both for individuals and communities. In globalization scholarship, these connectivities are approached somewhat differently: the focus is not so much on ‘communities’ as on ‘cultures.’ However, just as communities are seen to be in flux, unstable, and multiple, the same applies to culture. Rather than following individual connections made through networks, globalization scholars look at people, information, imagery, and power, constantly circulating through transnational space and touching down in

specific locales, creating new tensions around previously demarcated concepts such as home and away, local and global, ‘us’ and ‘them.’

From the view of mainstream media and advertising, the connectivities of globalization afford unprecedented opportunities for exploration, freedom and cultural mixing. This freedom is often linked to the ability of communications technologies to untether people from place, allowing them to remain *plugged-in* while on the move or to access ‘home’ media when living abroad. While the comfortable mobility and lifestyles depicted from this commercial vantage point are often portrayed in a way that is mainly the experience of ‘elites,’ this does not mean that world’s majority does not also experience the cultural effects of globalization.

As Tomlinson (1999) explains it, ‘complex connectivity,’ or, globalization, ‘weakens the ties of culture to place,’ creating an effect he calls ‘deterritorialization’ (29). In media studies, the implications of this deterritorialization has been widely researched, from political economy perspectives that trace globalization as US cultural imperialism or the exertion of transnational corporate power beholden to none, to cultural studies projects that look at ‘hybridity’ and ‘resistance’ as people deal with the intrusion of the global at the local level. For Appadurai (1996), it all comes down to two things: mass migration of people and media. He sees the global circulation of people and mediated imagery as making up the core of the ‘rupture’ that is globalization, claiming, “The story of mass migrations (voluntary and forced) is hardly a new feature of human history. But when it is juxtaposed with a rapid flow of mass-mediated images, scripts, and sensations, we have a new order of instability in the production of modern subjectivities” (p. 4). Appadurai notes that these new subjectivities are driven by the imagination – within the constant circulation of people and media, subjects

imagine themselves newly through others, through imagery, through thoughts of the global that transform the local.

Meanwhile, in public discourse, two main versions of these transformations are told. On the one hand, social politics in wealthy countries have often focused blame for cultural change on ‘immigrants’ – treating newcomers as a threat even in countries (e.g. Great Britain) where it has been determined that the nation cannot survive economically without them. At the same time, increasing internationalization of business ties are celebrated, as ‘multi-nodal’ communications infrastructure, international legal agreements, improved facility of travel, and widespread use of English as the common language of business coalesce to create broad networks of transnational organizations and a corresponding new generation of expatriate workers. This project focuses on these new expatriates and other types of ‘global nomads’ and ‘global souls’ as they have been called by D’Andrea (2007) and Iyer (2000) respectively, and their use of new media to tap into social networks in Paris.

The People: A new ‘Global Tribe’?

Participants in the ‘international meet-ups’⁶ find themselves in Paris, and in these groups, for many different reasons, such as career development, desires to ‘experience’ other cultures, study abroad, romantic partnerships with locals, and, simply, pursuit of dreams of living a romanticized version of ‘the Parisian life’; these variations will be discussed in later chapters. However, the most common ‘profile’ to describe attendees (and that to which the web-based

⁶ The term ‘meet-up’ *should* refer solely to events scheduled through the website meetup.com; however, the word is used idiomatically among the people I studied. For example, someone might say, “Are you going to the meet-up at Le Fumoir on Thursday?” even when the event was hosted by a group independent from meetup.com. Going with the common parlance, I will use the term ‘meet-up’ to refer to events sponsored by *any* of the websites, and for clarity will refer to either ‘meetup.com’ or a specific group’s name when referring to groups on that particular website.

groups seem to be explicitly geared) is what I call ‘globally migrating professionals,’ a term I borrowed and adapted somewhat from Anne-Meike Fechter’s (2007) ethnography of North American and European expatriate communities in Indonesia⁷. Fechter’s study is based on the conventional tendency of expatriate groups to form around co-national or co-regional ties, and she illustrates the complicated social and economic hierarchies within and among these factions in the Indonesian ‘expat community’. However, at the margins of her project, she also notes the emergence of a *new* generation of ‘mobile professionals’ that differs from the ‘traditional family expatriates’ that made up the focus of her study. She claims that these young professionals themselves express the sense that they are part of an emerging new ‘group’; According to one person interviewed, they are a ‘global tribe.’

Among her observations of this new group, Fechter says they *differ* from traditional expatriates in that they are:

- “Characterized by their highly itinerant work and life patterns, frequently change employers and places of residence of their own initiative, and take up a series of jobs in various countries” (2007, p. 128).
- Between the ages of 25 and 40, and are mostly single or in a non-cohabiting relationship (p. 9).
- Gender-balanced: “A considerable number of them are women, who moved to Jakarta as part of their own career rather than that of a spouse” (p. 10).
- Constructing themselves as “professionals with an international outlook in terms of their career, place of residence, and social networks. They have

⁷ While Fechter calls these people ‘mobile professionals’, I prefer to use the term ‘migrating professionals’ in order to keep close to mind the fact that these people are indeed migrants, even if on the privileged end of the migration spectrum.

mobile lives, and what they consider ‘cosmopolitan’ tastes in terms of lifestyle, housing and socializing” (p. 10).

- *Explicitly* aiming to work abroad – not only to gain international work experience, “but because a ‘global’ *lifestyle* is seen as attractive and exciting” (p. 128, emphases added).

While the gender balance, ‘single’ status, and continual mobility are interesting characteristics of this younger generation (and will be discussed at length herein), it is perhaps this proactive development of a *global lifestyle* that most specifically differentiates the new generation from traditional expatriates. The latter tended to accept a period of work abroad as a necessary sacrifice which would further *career trajectories at home*, while this new generation actively seeks to amass a repertoire of international experiences, associations, and knowledge as a matter of *self* development.

Through this project, globally migrating professionals have emerged as people very much imagining and conducting themselves *as selves*, with life trajectories and experiences to be amassed in entrepreneurial fashion, as do many other types of migrants mentioned on the previous page who have also embarked on roads to ‘international’ lives. Yet their participation in and discussions about the web-based groups adds rich complications to the notion of the free-floating and disconnected individual that paradoxically accompanies discourse on the websites, as well as in much academic and journalistic writing about these ‘types’ of migrants. The following chapters explore expressions and actions of selfhood and of group-hood considered in the local/global space of Paris and the multiple spaces of the various websites, as well as alongside the nations, corporations, and other organizations and endeavors in which these mobile lives are situated.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter Two addresses methodology, providing theoretical and empirical explanations for how and why I use a combination of ethnographic methods and Critical Discourse Analysis to explore and interpret this phenomenon. I address two key challenges to approaching ethnographic research in the context of this project: Designing an ethnography – traditionally a very locally situated method – of a ‘global space,’ and combining the study of online and offline settings into a holistically conceived subject for research. As the latter is a relatively new deployment of ethnography, I discuss the steps taken to develop research that recognizes the extent to which the on- and offline often blend together in ‘everyday life’ while still accounting for important differences in the two realms of the community studied. As is important for ethnographic ‘self-reflexivity,’ my discussion of these issues is elaborated through the story of my own experience in gaining access to the community(ies) and the resources I drew upon to ‘fit in.’ In light of the ethical issues that have come to the fore through critical review of traditional ethnographies, it is now imperative to examine ethics from multiple angles as part of any ethnographic research design. I thus conclude the chapter with a discussion of various ethical considerations that arose in the consideration and execution of this project.

Chapter Three describes the contextual setting of the project through a detailed description of the sites of focus, online and off. I begin with a discussion of ‘global Paris’ and explain how it is a city balancing both global and local tensions and ambitions, therein trying to paint a picture situating the constitution of an ‘international community’ in the city. Through ethnographic examples, I show how expatriates in the city join the international

meet-ups partly to access a local Paris that many find is closed to them otherwise. While the word ‘community’ is used liberally to describe the phenomenon created through the meet-ups (both idiomatically by participants and in my own descriptions of the field), the purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how this ‘international community’ is created as a transnational social space through the accumulation of online and offline international meet-ups. To this end, I introduce the literature on ‘global cities’ and Paris’ role in that circuit; I then discuss theoretical moves that provide an opportunity to imagine ‘social space’ as dislocated from physical ‘place’ (while maintaining the ‘meaning’ traditionally reserved for ‘place’). To fill in the theoretical discussion with an actual picture of how the international community is created in Paris, I provide empirical descriptions of the online and offline sites that constitute it, and include examples from conversations with participants to illustrate how that space is imbued with meaning.

Chapter Four reviews early globalization literature that saw migration as a polarized scale of high-flying elites and war-torn refugees and then moves to introduce the more recent scholarship that acknowledges the wide range of middle-class migrants embarking on transnational lifestyles and careers. I then ethnographically demonstrate, through the construction of narratives about five different participants – based on a selection of field-notes and interviews – how while there may be no ‘typical’ category of meet-up attendee, it is clear that in general, members are far from being the mobile ‘elites’ discussed in early works. I then introduce work by Ulrich Beck and Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim that suggests we have outgrown categories such as ‘class’ and must find new ways of comprehending the multiple and contradictory social statuses that accompany new modes of life and consumption. Considering this loosely defined ‘group,’ I then discuss how these people are

using media technologies in their lives abroad, and situate the discussion within other literature on media and migration.

The purpose of this chapter is to break up and complicate the monolithic category of ‘elites’ and demonstrate how the resulting ‘group’ could be considered within the body of literature on migration and media. I do this to highlight the differences not only between members of the Paris ‘international community’ and transnational ‘elites’ of globalization discourse, but also with other bounded ‘identity’ groups that have been studied in relation to media use in an age of globalization. This provides the foundation for the rest of the dissertation, which focuses directly on questions of identity, media, and global migration.

I have conceptualized this dissertation around how new communications technologies shape, and are shaped by, new social practices in a world characterized by globalizing processes. Herein I explore how individualized and community-forming practices involving new media relate to formations of identity and connectedness in mobile transnational space. The connection between media and identity is not made lightly, and a large body of research makes, contests, and finesses claims in this regard (e.g. Philpott 2000; Roesler 2008; Warde 1994). Strelitz (2002) critiques views that insinuate ‘the notion of a media powerful enough to shape our self-identities and our views of the world’ (p. 153). He draws on Tomlinson’s critique of media studies to assert that ‘overly-strong claims for media power arise as a result of media theorists seeing the media as determining rather than mediating cultural experience’ (Tomlinson summarized in Strelitz 2002, p. 153). He then points to Warde’s critique that to privilege media consumption – and consumption overall – neglects the many other identifications that articulate identity, such as ethnic, occupational and kin groups:

While acknowledging that in some part the artifacts of consumer culture are deployed performatively in the attempt to differentiate the actor from others within and beyond a given social circle, a more measured analysis will maintain that the answer to the question ‘who am I?’ is closely bound to that of ‘who are we?’ and that the answer to both these questions is likely to involve consideration of social location, involvement in social networks, involuntary exposure to persuasive communications, and so forth. (Warde quoted in Strelitz 2002, p. 154)

While my research is thoroughly grounded in media studies, and thus does indeed privilege new media as ‘sites’, I see communications technologies not as *determining* action but as spheres *for* action (and being acted upon) in processes related to identity and connectedness. Chapter Five is organized to interpret these practices in ways that attempt to avoid portraying a determined techno-culture or postulating new ways of being that neglect historical situatedness related to categorical and relational identities. By breaking down the organization of the chapter to address various aspects of ‘identity’, my hope is that a sense of a larger picture unfolds.

For Chapter Five, I am indebted to an approach proposed by Brubaker and Cooper (2000), who problematize the concept of ‘identity’ insofar as it is used as both a category of social and political *practice* and as a category of *analysis*, and argue for disposing of it as a category of analysis altogether. They point out that in collapsing all of these forms under the term ‘social construction of identity’, “linking and separating get called by the same name, making it harder to grasp the processes, causes, and consequences of differing patterns of crystallizing difference and forging connections” (p. 23). Brubaker and Cooper suggest, instead, separating usage of ‘identity’ into three categories of analysis: Identification and

Categorization; Self-understanding and Social Location; and Commonality, Connectedness, Groupness. Chapter Five is developed around these themes, with the purpose of breaking down how and why various identifications, imaginations, selves, collectivities and exclusions are created through and mediated by new deployments of communications technologies in a ‘diverse’ transnational social space.

A look at ‘Identification and Categorization,’ the first in this tripartite set of relations around identity, explores the terms that groups and participants employ to construct the categories of belonging; for example, what is it that makes an *international person*? Through examples from the online discourse and offline participation, I show how categorization is a particularly vexed issue in a community where origins, routes traveled, languages amassed, and modes of continual mobility (such as the emphatic declaration, ‘I am not a tourist’) are discussed in multiple and sometimes paradoxical ways to articulate identification with the global.

The chapter then considers ‘Self-understanding and Social Location’ by focusing on aspects of the *international self* as an entrepreneurial project. Cut off from many categorical identities, the ‘global loner’-self is said to belong anywhere and nowhere at once. Challenges to this subjectivity are explored through consideration of individuals’ ‘social location’ in the international meet-ups, as race, gender, class, and nationality retain valence, and various types of capital are seen assessed by individuals to perceive their own belonging in a field of others.

While sociologists and geographers may see global cities as the key nodes in transnational spatial formations, scholars of the ‘network society’ locate each *individual* at the center of his/her complex social formation. Jan van Dijk (2006) posits that the rise in use

and further development of new communications technologies has followed a societal trend in which social relations are increasingly stretched across large distances (p. 38). People are moving – domestically and internationally – more frequently and widely than they did in the past, weaving a network of social and business relationships along the way. Theories of the ‘network society’ (Van Dijk, J. 2006; Castells, 2004) are key to seeing globally mobile professionals as individuals situated within diverse networks, rather than as primarily grouped by nationality or ethnicity. In parallel, the increasingly common idea of a ‘self’ to be developed and maintained as a life project is acknowledged as a technology of governance under neo-liberalism. I draw on Ulrich Beck’s discussions of the individualization of society to theoretically situate these interpretations.

Finally, the chapter interrogates the nature of a Paris ‘international community’ with a look at ‘Commonality, Connectedness, Groupness’ in the web and face-to-face groups. While taking assertions of an existing ‘community’ at face value in the ethnographic narrative, I now critically examine the meaning(s) of ‘community’ as deployed in this context. Drawing on interviews with group founders and organizers, as well as participants, I discuss various conceptions of what community is, how it is constructed, and the challenges to making it happen among a group of un-rooted and continuously mobile people. In *Technically Together: Rethinking Community within Techno-Society*, Michelle Willson (2006) claims that the “current use of technology leads to accentuation and a focus on the individual and to her/his compartmentalization” (p. 6). According to her, this compartmentalization or fragmentation of the subject, combined with the transient nature of online communication, disconnects the individual from his or her surrounding community. Willson’s concerns are echoed in many ways by people attempting to organize these ‘local’ communities in global

Paris, particularly regarding the lack of commitment by members who are transient and may be involved in multiple branches of the ‘international community’. At the same time, it is noted that it is precisely this anxiety – a feeling of disconnection – that draws participants to the communities in the first place, and that they utilize the mechanisms of online communication to get there.

Once ‘there,’ what connects members of the so-called community? On almost all of the websites, the nature of the group is a certain *mindset* oriented towards the ‘global,’ and often encompassed by the overall term, ‘like-minded.’ I consider this discourse on mindedness in two ways. First, I analyze online expressions of ‘mindedness’ as a group-unifying theme and triangulate these insights with interpretations of the bodily experience of ‘being there’ in the face-to-face events. A precise need to *be with* others in a bodily/physical way emerges through interviews with event attendees along with a pervasive sense that the parties function for many as ‘pick-up scenes.’ Second, I consider how exclusions work in the cultivation of a collective identity built on tenets of open-mindedness and inclusiveness.

The question of exclusion is shown to be somewhat complicated when I gain access to the exclusive website, A Small World, which promises to link me to an elite offline social circle made up of people ‘of my same kind.’ In a social group made up of people accustomed to moving with ease across borders, the exclusivity of A Small World – while a signal of ‘cultural capital’ (Bourdieu 1977)⁸ in discussions at *other* events – proves stifling for creating

⁸ In his introduction to the English language translation of Bourdieu’s (1991) *Language and Symbolic Power*, John B. Thompson nicely summarizes the meaning of ‘cultural capital’ as well as how this term fits with Bourdieu’s categories of capital: “One of the central ideas of Bourdieu’s work...is the idea that there are different forms of capital: not only ‘economic capital’ in the strict sense (i.e. material wealth in the form of money, stocks and shares, property, etc.), but also ‘cultural capital’ (i.e. knowledge, skills and other cultural acquisitions, as exemplified by educational or technical qualifications), ‘symbolic capital’ (i.e. accumulated prestige or honour), and so on” (p. 14).

a dynamic offline scene. Instead, open-access events emerge as the more vibrant spaces, and in this case exclusions are indirect and involve both material and psychological barriers.

The concluding chapter, Chapter Six, is meant to bring the various threads of previous chapters back together for an overall theoretical consideration of how and why a Paris ‘international community’ is constructed through online and offline practices. Insights gleaned from this up-close look at self and collective identifications working at a particular nexus of migration and media illustrate new practices for pursuing belonging in today’s world. While Brubaker and Cooper note that ‘identities’ have traditionally been seen as categorical (e.g. race, class, gender, nationality) or relational (e.g. kinship, networking), assessing the online/offline international community of Paris through their approach highlights the prominence of experiential (what have you done? where have you been?) and functional (based on a variety of needs) modes of attaching self to group.

The discussion has methodological dimensions, in terms of designing ethnographic studies that bridge the online and offline, and theoretical dimensions, particularly as we work toward a more detailed understanding of new collectivities emerging through globalization, and the implications such groups have for re-conceiving previous models for collective identity, particularly that of ‘social class.’

I conclude by suggesting that future research should take a more macro-oriented approach to consider identities in the context of a world governed by neo-liberal capitalism. Globally migrating professionals should be studied at an intersection of both national and corporate identification. I suggest that future research should critically explore *how* global mindsets are identified and mobilized as productive labor by global corporations. For example, a cursory review of publications for Human Resource professionals demonstrates a

strategic concern with finding and developing ‘global mindsets’, while corporate recruitment ads in publications such as *The Economist*, illustrate the efforts that transnational corporate recruitment marketers make to portray the lifestyle of the migrating professional as cutting-edge and personally rewarding. The phenomenon seems to have institutional dimensions as well, as university exchange programs increasingly offer corporate internship opportunities as a part of the study-abroad package.

I should note that in recounting my participation in the day-to-day life as a ‘member’ of Paris’ international community, I often use terms that lead double-lives depending on whether they are deployed theoretically or in the field. In the narrative that follows, idioms will be used frequently but will not go unquestioned. Additionally, while I have used the term ‘international’ in accordance with common practice among participants, in theoretical terms the concept of the *transnational* is a more apt framework for conceiving the ‘international community’ in Paris. Ong (1999) characterizes *transnational* as “the condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space,” which “has been intensified under late capitalism” (p. 4). The web forums and cocktail parties of globally migrating professionals are theorized as transnational spaces, even as the groups and their members will be called ‘international’ through the descriptive details.

Overall, this project attempts an intervention in the body of work on media, migration, and globalization in the following ways:

- Providing ethnographic detail to illustrate actual practices that help make up the macro-theoretical concept of a ‘global network society’

- Complicating the category term, 'elites,' which has been cast widely and perhaps too hastily tried to enclose all skilled or privileged migrants in its net, while opening up understanding of new categories and ways of seeing privileged migration and accompanying cosmopolitan collectivities.
- Sharing the efforts at identification and community-building through new media enacted by migrating people who have heretofore not been studied as a 'group' in studies of migration and media precisely because their groupness is undefined.

As Fechter (2007) points out, "the lives of members of this group of mobile professionals are rarely described in empirical detail" and "there remains a call for more micro-level, phenomenological studies of the everyday reality of 'global mobility'" (p. 22). This is precisely what the following pages will attempt to do, with a particular focus on how new media technologies are deployed in making such 'everyday realities' more bearable, or even sometimes, enjoyable. Readers will find that the people who make up the main focus of this work are for the most part in a particular life stage: single, between the ages of 25 and 40, and at relatively early stages in their careers. While Internet-based and other types of community-forming groups are also available to people with families, longer-term residents, etc, the Internet groups I studied seemed to attract the particular subset of people mentioned above, and likely this commonality helped those people to 'fit in.'

While the narrow scope of the research group has limitations in that it does not suggest the possibility of generalizing to other types of migrants, this dissertation will also make the case that the migrants studied here are an indication of an important and growing group. Understanding their practices for coping, belonging, and forming new types of community (and the role of media in these practices) will yield new perspectives through

which much can be learned about new modes of life coming into being through globalizing business, cultural, and mediated processes.

Chapter Two

Ethnography in a Global Space: Methods, Access, Ethics

Electronic mediation and mass migration mark the world of the present not as technically new forces but as ones that seem to impel (and sometimes compel) the work of the imagination... The ethnographer needs to find new ways to represent the links between the imagination and social life... This link is increasingly a global and deterritorialized one.

- Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 1996

Just as modernity is associated with the nation as the primary unit for attachment (e.g. Balibar 1991; O’Byrne 2003), postmodernity is associated with debates about the extent to which the nation has lost, maintained or shifted relevancy (e.g. Appadurai 1993; Yuval-Davis 1999). Accompanying this discourse are questions about how new modes of belonging may be developing ‘beyond the nation’ in the age of globalization (e.g. Cheah & Robbins 1998; Croucher 2004; O’Byrne 2003).

Works by Benedict Anderson (1983) and Arjun Appadurai (1996) provide fence posts for envisioning the role of mediated communications in processes of forming national, trans- or post-national subjectivities in the historical movement from the modern to the postmodern age. Anderson’s historical work links ‘print capitalism’ – media such as newspapers and novels, printed in vernacular languages and distributed to mass audiences (whose colonial locations meant that readers were often separated by great distances) – to the development of deep feelings of fraternity among people who remained mostly anonymous to one another, or what we’ve come to know as ‘nationalism.’ His notion of the ‘nation’ as an ‘imagined political community’ provides the model for linking media, imagination, and belonging. Appadurai extends this idea to contemporary times to suggest how imagination is affected

and mobilized through circuits of electronic media and migrating people to produce new subjectivities in a globalizing world. As referenced in the quote at the top of the chapter, he challenges ethnographers to utilize the method as an avenue for understanding meaning and social processes at the intersection of media and migration.

This chapter addresses how this dissertation works at that nexus. I introduce the methodologies used to conceive of and study how an ‘international community’ in Paris is created through online and offline sites, and then discuss issues surrounding my gaining access to both the sites and group members, concluding the chapter with a discussion of ethical and other issues that arise when doing so.

Methods

Ethnography in a Global Context

Sociologist Steven Castles (2003) has spearheaded multidisciplinary efforts to study migration as a global rather than national object of study. He points to a need to take ‘global flows’ and ‘networks’ as the key framework for social relations, while maintaining an understanding of the roles states play in geopolitical and economic migration issues. When migration is viewed outside of nation-centric frameworks, “migrants are then seen as moving, not between ‘container societies,’ but rather within ‘transnational social space’ in which ‘global cities’ ...form the key nodes” (p. 27). I argue that a loose network formation called the ‘international community’ exists in global cities around the world, produced as a ‘transnational social space’ through combined online and offline activities of globally

migrating professionals and a cadre of other types of ‘temporary’⁹ migrants. I draw on a variety of ethnographic and interpretive methods to explore the producers, production, and boundaries of that space in ‘global Paris’.

Ethnography is a ‘case study approach’ developed by anthropologists to allow for the “in-depth study of the culture of a people, group, or community” (Sluka & Robben 2007:4). Practitioners of this highly *localized* approach to research have debated how to take advantage of the level of detail and description that is its hallmark to obtain a more empirically based understanding of ‘the global’: “The task of ethnography is the unraveling of a conundrum: What is the nature of locality, as a lived experience, in a globalized, deterritorialized world?” (Appadurai 1991, in Murphy & Kraidy 2003:299).

One key for approaching this conundrum has been a “postmodern move away from single site/local to examine circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time/space” (Marcus 1995:95). According to Marcus, such ‘multi-sited’ ethnographic work *acknowledges* macrotheoretical concepts related to globalization, “but does not rely on them for the contextual architecture framing a set of subjects” (p. 96):

This mobile ethnography takes unexpected trajectories in tracing a cultural formation across and within multiple sites of activity that destabilize the distinction, for example, between lifeworld¹⁰ and system, by which much ethnography has been conceived. Just as this mode investigates and ethnographically constructs the lifeworlds of variously situated subjects, it also ethnographically constructs aspects of

⁹ By ‘temporary’ I refer to people who have not ‘immigrated’ to the host country permanently. Temporary migrants may still be in a host country for a long time but they do not intend to ‘put down roots’ forever.

¹⁰ ‘Lifeworld,’ a term originally coined by Husserl (1970), refers to the phenomenological perspective that considers a person’s experiences and beliefs as meaningful in their own right, and not as enacted upon by an outside force such as ‘superstructure.’

the system itself through the associations and connections it suggests among the sites.
(p. 96)

The following chapters map discourses and practices of *being* and *belonging* in relation to lifestyles forged in and through globalization and migration. Practices involving both online media and physical places are examined in the search for cultural meanings and identities forming and re-forming in spaces that are neither local nor global, real nor virtual. Through this process of mapping, a detailed picture emerges of actual practices involved in constituting a global ‘network society,’ and illustrating new considerations of community and belonging in an age of unprecedented mobility and individualization.

Bridging Online and Offline Worlds

Ethnographic research of online spaces is increasingly common (e.g. see Hine 2000 and Johns, Chen & Hall 2004 for methodological approaches, or Williams 2006 and Constable 2003 for empirical examples), and although researchers are now long past the time when the Internet was studied as a separate ‘virtual world’ completely sealed off from embodied life, as recently as 2005, Orgad lamented that even in studies that “combined offline methodologies such as interviews with Internet users, almost no attention was given to the implications of moving from online to offline with research informants and of triangulating the two kinds of interactions and the data they generated” (2005:51).

Her critique, rightly pointing out the need to develop a more reflexive understanding of how the *online* affects *offline* relationships and perspectives, and vice versa, builds the case that acknowledging offline influences to online research will lead to a significant

understanding of the *online* subject that could not be reached otherwise. In other words, the offline component is considered to *validate* the interpretations of the online component.

This project indeed attempts such validation through triangulation among online and offline discourse; however, rather than *only* using the offline context to situate a study of an online group, I approach the websites and face-to-face events as integrated components of a ‘community’ *mutually* constituted through the on- and offline ‘worlds.’ This is epistemologically challenging, but a recent conference paper by Kim and Schriener (2007) suggests a useful theoretical model – that of ‘connected community’ – for integrating study of the ‘virtual’ and the ‘real.’ They “look at the way Internet users *experience* community, rather than at the *existence* of community” (p. 9) by assessing the degree to which “individuals in the group are connected through any form of communication” (p. 11): on the Internet, the telephone and other communications technologies, *and* through face-to-face interactions.

However, *differences* that emerge in the on- and offline discourse remain instructive for how online media and face-to-face environments invite varied interactions and performances. Marcus points out that in ‘multi-sited ethnographic research, de facto comparative dimensions develop...as a function of the fractured, discontinuous plane of movement and discovery among sites as one maps an object of study and needs to post logics of relationship, translation, and association among these sites’ (1996:102). In this project, I conceive of the online and offline as mutually constituting sites that make up an *entire* ethnographic field, yet while doing so, I map the ‘fractured, discontinuous plane’ of these multiple sites – online and offline – and people that constitute an ‘international community’ in Paris.

The Research Process

Tomlinson (1999) describes globalization as ‘complex connectivity’ with ‘deterritorialized cultural processes’ at the intersection. Drawing on Tomlinson’s definition of ‘culture’ as “all these mundane *practices* that directly contribute to people’s ongoing ‘life narratives’” (p. 20, emphasis added), I observed these practices and invited the telling of narratives as a method for exploring and interpreting the development of a deterritorialized cultural formation.

Critical Discourse Analysis of Online Texts

I began with a close and critical reading of discourse on the web sites for international people in Paris, drawing from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) methods. In his elaboration of the ‘principles of critical discourse analysis,’ Teun van Dijk (1993) explains that CDA should focus on ‘the role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance’ (p. 249) and suggests that researchers ask ‘what structures, strategies or other properties of text, talk, verbal interaction or communicative events play a role in these modes of reproduction’ (p. 250). Fairclough (2000) emphasizes that this process should integrate social theory, so that social practices and their relationship to social structures can be examined in a way that bridges the ‘structure and agency divide.’ Bringing social theory to the study of ‘texts’ means that social practice is seen as a ‘practice of production’ that leads to specific local relationships. Among the ‘elements’ that Fairclough sees as working through texts are ‘types of activity’, ‘spatial and temporal locations’, ‘material resources’, ‘particular experiences, knowledges and wants’, and ‘semiotic resources including language’. I analyzed web texts produced through interactivity of group founders and members, and later triangulated the

analysis with interpretations from face-to-face events and interviews to consider online texts in terms of all of these elements.

Critical discourse analytic methods look at the structures of interfaces in addition to content portrayed within them, and this greatly informed my method of approaching the websites for analysis. For example, I focused on template categories created on the sites, and on how other ‘forms’ were organized, and considered how these structures may have related to written content and overall ‘experience’ of the site (e.g. as a ‘community’) in comparison to the goals of the group expressed by the organizers in the ‘about us’ text. I also considered how the organizer-produced texts related to member-produced texts in terms of categorical terms utilized, self and group descriptions, range of experiences discussed, and other methods of presentation of self and group identities.

Also, as identities are always constructed through processes of ‘other-ing’ (Bhabha in Rutherford 1998), I considered the nature of exclusions that arose through the cultivation of a collective identity built on tenets of open-mindedness and inclusiveness. I then shifted into ethnographic observation of the sites for three months, and used those insights to prepare for my stay in Paris.

Ethnographic Research

Before going to Paris, and in accordance with the requirements of the Institutional Review Board¹¹ at Penn State University, I contacted the organizers of each web-group to explain my project and ask for permission to attend their events as a participant-observer for research purposes. In every case, the organizer responded that I was welcome; some also indicated

¹¹ For a copy of my approved application to the Pennsylvania State University Institutional Review Board, please see Appendix A.

willingness to meet with me for an interview. Eventually, I interviewed two organizers from Expats Paris and one from International Events in Paris; these interviews were some of the most interesting that I conducted, and discussing the experiences and concerns of the organizers added a cogent dimension to my awareness that while the Internet as a technology is an efficient organizing tool, the dedicated labor of human beings is a crucial component to making a community.

When I arrived in Paris, I immediately set to work making a calendar of events planned by the groups I was studying. This was disappointing at first because only Expats Paris, whose monthly cocktail and luncheon were consistently held in the same venues, listed events with much advanced lead-time; other groups sent out email notifications when an event was planned, sometimes with only two or three days' notice. I soon got into the swing of things, trusting that during the course of the week I would receive email notifications of various events – including a Monday morning 'digest' emailed by meetup.com, which consisted of a list of *all* events planned in Paris for the upcoming week. In the digest, events planned by groups of which I was a member were highlighted in pink, additional events that meetup.com thought would particularly interest me were highlighted in yellow, and all other events were in regular text.

A key part of the research process involved writing thickly descriptive notes in a journal after each event. These notes were later analyzed as 'texts' from which I could glean major and minor themes around which to center my analysis. Throughout my time in the field, I continually referred back to previous journal notes, to identify issues or questions that would be useful in interviews with participants. The following excerpt from my journal provides an example of this process. This is a description of the first event I attended, an

Apero Trendy hosted by International Events at a bar in the city center on my third day in Paris:

I just got back from my first event, a last-minute Apero organized by the meet-up group “International Events in Paris” at a bar called Gallerie 31 in the St. Germain de Pres area. I was so nervous before going... what to wear? Are dark jeans okay or do I need to look ‘business’? I had my outfit put together but then it was slightly chilly and there was the new problem of what jacket to wear? Would the black down vest with the fur collar be too “American”? But then I thought, okay, if it’s an international group, it should be okay to have a look tied to a particular place, right?

Still nervous... I figured out the directions to get there - metro and then walking - a couple blocks past the famous church at St Germain... I told myself I could walk by the bar first and then decide if I could force myself to go in or not. I saw a guy up ahead of me turn right, then double back and go the other way. I wondered if he was looking for the place too. I turned the way he had finally chosen, and there it was. I couldn’t believe I was going into a bar alone – in Paris.

Immediately inside the door is a Southeast Asian guy who looks very approachable, like a party host. I talk to him...something easy like “is this the meet-up group?” We introduce ourselves. He’s not the host, just a guest, looking for people to meet. The bar is not yet packed with people – I’ve arrived pretty much on time, or maybe 15 minutes late. The place has floor-to-ceiling windows that open onto the sidewalks. The bar itself is in the middle of the room, and people gather around it on three sides. It’s brightly, warmly lit. The guy I’m speaking to is Aiden¹²,

¹² All names have been changed – and in certain cases other identifying details have been changed as well – in an effort to protect the anonymity of participants.

from Singapore. After learning I'm from the US, he tells me that he went to college in Michigan. After that he went to do a masters in Switzerland and now works in Paris. He was nice to talk to, easy, friendly. He reminded me of a Malaysian friend, with his mannerisms and way of speaking, and something about his 'outlook.' He will be my first interview. I also talked to a German girl who seemed very nice but seemed then to quickly gravitate to other German speakers. (In fact, at a later point in the night, many small language groups had formed). I pointed this out to Aiden and he said: "Of course, makes sense" and then he added "and the blondes usually get cornered eventually."

Another small group tried to join Aiden and I and a Canadian guy named Pedro. It was difficult conversation because the men in the group kept trying to talk to me (not to each other and not to the woman who introduced herself as being from 'South Amerca-US'). It made me uncomfortable, like it was just a pick-up contest, so I kept directing comments to the 'South America-US' gal who didn't respond very warmly – answering me in an 'of course' sort of way with no elaborations.

I left them and talked to a woman from Toledo, Spain who has lived in France for the last five years. We spoke in Spanish. I then met two French guys who said they came to the party to practice English but who mostly spoke to me in French. I met an American woman from Kansas City, named Claire, who had moved to Paris for work. It's her third time living here. She seemed cool. She said she's going to the lunch on Friday, hosted by another group, Expats Paris (I'm going too), and that she also joined a group for people working at home and the group of American Expats in Paris. Aiden said he likes the group called Expats Paris the most, because it has a

wider range of age groups and types of people. Claire, who, like me was attending a meet-up for the first time, asked him about these groups: “Do people make real relationships from this?” His response was “Yes and no: relationships, one-night-stands, parties, couples...”

Then a German guy who is a TV correspondent for one of Germany’s largest private TV stations joined us and said he’d just arrived in Paris two days ago. He said he visited a colleague in Paris a year ago and she took him to one of the meet-ups on a riverboat. So when he got here two days ago, she (who doesn’t live here anymore) reminded him about it. He checked it out online tonight and noticed there was a party in two hours – and he came at the last minute.

People were friendly, mostly open to a conversation. There was a lot of “Where are you from?” and “How long have you been/will you be in Paris?” After that, conversations could die quickly, with no one coming up with anything else to say. And that would be followed by hasty re-grouping (Field-notes, September 2, 2008).

This excerpt is important for two reasons. The first is that in this initial foray into the meet-up world, I met various people who turned out to be key protagonists throughout my experience in the field. The Singaporean man referenced in the excerpt above, Aiden, became the first person whom I interviewed, and when we met at future meet-ups I was greeted as if by an old friend. The woman who introduced herself as ‘South America-US’ and who at first seemed quite cold towards me, is someone who I met regularly over the next three months – more than once we provided each other the solace of being the only recognizable face in a crowd; she was one of my final, and most fascinating, interview participants. Claire, from

Kansas, U.S. became my good friend and practically a research partner, what traditionally has been called an ethnographic ‘informant.’ She frequently came running up to me at events to say, ‘Erika, you have to meet X – she’s lived all over the world!’

Second, the excerpt gives a basic idea of what happened at the meet-ups and how I documented the scene. People commonly arrived alone – as I did here and would continue to do on many occasions – yet were only left standing nervously at the entrance for a moment. A constant circulation of people moved about the room, walking up to one another and ‘breaking the ice’ by simply saying, “Hi. My name is _____.” The founder of Expats Paris later discussed with me the obvious simplicity yet uniqueness to this type of social formula:

The irony is if you – particularly within French culture – if you just walked into a bar and started talking to people, you’d be treated like the biggest psycho in the world. But you sign up and you go, and it’s like, this is your free ticket to just talk to everyone around you.

In fact, most meet-up attendees seem to agree on, and put into practice, a series of unwritten rules, including that people should *not* be left standing alone, and that if anyone tries to join a conversation they are welcomed with a standard ritual of exchanging names, nationalities, and reasons for being in Paris. These and other common practices of ‘positive politeness’ made the meet-ups welcoming to newcomers and people arriving alone. Other ‘rules’ emerged that related to what is referred to by intercultural communications researchers as ‘negative politeness’ (Brown & Levinson 1987); for example, conversation partners frequently changed, and it was impolite to try to monopolize a person’s attention for too long.

Overall, the mobility, flexibility, adaptability and independence that characterize the *lives* of attendees were also the expected norms in the meet-ups. I quickly became adapted to these norms and internalized them as *ways of being* at the events. Sometimes this led to very different behavior than what I would enact in social situations in my ‘real life’. For example, the following excerpt from my field-notes demonstrates a moment when I notice myself doing something that was completely acceptable in the scope of meet-up etiquette, but anathema to how I would normally behave. I had invited Alain, a Cameroonian man, to accompany me to an *Apero* after, during our hour-long interview earlier that evening, he had confessed that he was nervous to attend alone. Here is an excerpt from my notes of that evening:

Alain and I sat on one of the sofas and a French guy that I met last week came up and sat with us. Conversation with the French guy was a major labor; he would not speak much and attempts to engage him in conversation generated monosyllabic responses. At some point Alain and I were finished eating and I wanted to get back to mingling, so we got up, and suddenly I realized that the French guy was still eating and since he had joined us perhaps it was rude to just get up and leave him eating alone! But it was kind of too late.... We had already packed up and started away... and on the other hand, I felt like everyone is on their own in this place, and in fact I wasn't obligated to sit with him (and perhaps I wasn't obligated to keep taking care of Alain, although I felt more so since I had brought him with me).

During three months in Paris I attended an average of two events per week, writing detailed notes after each. I did not just interpret the scene from my own perspective: In addition to attending events, I conducted 23 separate interviews with a total of 25 meet-up

users. I talked with interview participants about the trajectories and experiences¹³ (personal, educational and professional) that had characterized their lives beyond the borders of their nations-of-birth; their histories and experiences using the Internet to create an offline social circle; what brought them to Paris; their experiences in and thoughts regarding the ‘international community’ in Paris; their use of communications technologies to manage their mobile lifestyles; their general ‘media diets’; and their thoughts/plans for the future.

Beyond the three group organizers, the majority of interviewees were people I had met at the events; however, I also conducted seven interviews with people whose profiles I found on the group web-pages but whom I had not yet met face-to-face when I contacted them through meet-up’s direct email function. People gravitated to the meet-ups for varied reasons, and all of their motivations contribute to understanding the meet-up experience. However, not all of them would make for insightful interviews in relation to this project. I typically asked someone for an interview if one of two conditions were met: First, if the meet-ups that made up the focus of my study were clearly an important part of their social lives (e.g. if I had seen them at multiple events); and/or second, if it was clear the person fit into the category of ‘globally migrating professionals’ that Fechter (2007) had noticed at the margins of her study and in whom I was particularly interested for understanding how the web groups were used for creating connections and community for people whose mobility and uprootedness were part of lifestyles integrally connected to their careers.

While it seems clear that a study of a community that claims to be ‘international’ should by definition include people from a range of national backgrounds, I did not make any conscious attempt at representing diversity through my range of selected interview participants. However, simply by following the two criteria stated above, my pool of twenty-

¹³ See Appendix C for a list of general questions that I discussed with interview participants.

five interviewees ended up including people from every continent except Australia, and from a total of twenty countries. Additionally, some interview participants identified themselves as being from two or more different countries, either through their parental roots (e.g. Korean-German) or the routes of their upbringing (e.g. South America - USA).

Interviews typically occurred in a café-bar, and lasted about an hour (overall, I recorded a total of 23.04 interview hours, an average of almost exactly one hour per interview). I recorded and later transcribed each interview, analyzing the transcriptions using NVIVO¹⁴ qualitative analytic software to organize excerpts from transcription texts into general themes and sub-themes in accordance with the theoretical models I was using. I based this taxonomy on a framework proposed by Brubaker and Cooper (2000) to separate analysis of ‘identity’ into a study of categorical identifications, self perceptions, and group commonalities. These overall themes were considered along with those that came out of the analysis of the online discourse, but were not collapsed into each other.

In writing my interpretations of events and their meanings, I have attempted as much as possible to incorporate multiple voices representing varied interests or ‘realities’ into the narrative. Sluka and Robben (2007) point out that the objectives for the ‘new ethnography’ include the incorporation of ‘multivocality’ and an interest in representing ‘cross-cultural communication,’ as well as “with making explicit the ways in which fieldwork is conducted and research participants are incorporated into the account” (p. 19). At the same time, it must

¹⁴ NVIVO is one of many software packages available for organizing large amounts of qualitative text. It is cumbersome to learn to use at maximum capacity, but I mainly used it for the computerized ability to conduct the organizing that would traditionally be done with note-cards or other paper-based methods (e.g. noting themes and saving examples of conversations, interviews, notes, and other texts that support those themes). I then consulted the resulting ‘catalogue’ of themes-with-samples when I wanted to include ethnographic examples to support themes discussed in my analysis; for example, when discussing the development of projects of the ‘self’ as an ‘international person’ or issues in creating ‘community’ that were noted by group organizers and other interviewees.

be recognized that ethnographic writing, in that it represents piecing together, translating, and including and excluding the words, meaning, and realities of others, is the writing of a fiction – even if ‘true fiction’ (Clifford & Marcus 1986).

Access

Fitting-in: Researching My ‘Own Backyard’

Traditionally, ethnographic methods demanded a ‘scientific’ separation between the observer and the observed, which usually meant embedding oneself for a year or longer among a group of culturally distinct ‘Others’ – often a tribal or other ‘exotic primordial’ community – and conducting a detailed mapping and analysis of their social structure and ‘ways of life.’ Ethical issues and critiques that emerged from research participants in the 1960s and 70s called attention to the gross power imbalances that allowed for an ethnographer to enter into a community, get what s/he needed, and leave, going on to make a career out of pontificating about that distant people and their ‘unique’ ways. Ethnographers thus began to focus on conducting a more ‘reflexive anthropology’ that “turns the fieldworker’s ongoing negotiation of his or her professional role into an object of study, analyzes the power relations involved, and questions the nature of participant observation” (Sluka & Robben 2007:9). Since this ‘postmodern turn,’ it is not only recognized that scientific separation from the subject of research is impossible, but researchers are now actually encouraged to do everything possible to *break down* barriers and conduct studies of communities or scenes into which the researcher can be integrated. This ‘new ethnography’ aims to flexibly move among many sites and cultures, and is used to explore subjectivities and experiences within which the researcher is also *situated* rather than assuming a privileged spectatorship.

In Paris, I was one of many foreigners passing through the city for a limited time as a part of my career trajectory. In conversation at the meet-ups, if someone asked me what I was doing in Paris (a common question), I told the truth, in accordance with the requirements of the Institutional Review Board – something like: “I’m conducting doctoral dissertation research on scenes just like this one, to understand how the Internet can be used by people who have moved to a new country to access a social scene.” The admittance that my presence at the event was as a researcher *never* made a conversation come to a halt – not even once. In fact, most of the time people were very *interested* to hear that a researcher had decided to study the ‘meet-up phenomenon’ (as it was called by an American jazz piano player who sat next to me at an Expat Paris luncheon), and pursued the topic with me further. The following excerpt from my field-notes illustrates such a moment. I have suddenly found myself ‘on the spot’ at the very small (at that moment, just three people including myself) International Nomad Community gathering:

When they finally asked me what I was doing in Paris, I hesitated: how much to tell them? It’s a bit awkward to say outright, ‘I’m studying you.’ But I basically said it – I explained I was studying the groups and interested in the types of community that can form through the groups. Well, just like with Marco, they were very interested in this subject and dove right into it!! (OHHH, I wish I’d had my recorder!!) In fact, during a later lull in the conversation, Jonathan brought up the topic again, confessing that he couldn’t stop thinking about it (Field-notes, October 11, 2008).

One reason the topic of my research generated so much interest was that it was one of the few things everyone at the events had in common, and was a welcome divergence from the banalities of ‘Where are you from?’ The fact that people did not distance themselves

from me when they realized I was studying them, but even used it as a topic to further the conversation – combined with the group ethic of not leaving anyone standing alone – actually made it very difficult for me to blend into the background as an ‘observer.’

Actual *participation* in the events, rather than just off-to-the-side observation, required me to draw on competencies that would allow me to fit-in with the group. And while I may rely on academic training to *interpret* the international meet-up scene, I had to rely on other life experiences and skills to *access* it. Important among the competencies for gaining access was first and foremost my comfort among the demographic that I was studying. While I did not come from the upper-class background that I – at the time, and wrongly, as it turned out – assumed the rest of the group came from, I had traveled and lived abroad, and thus could understand a variety of cosmopolitan references that dotted conversations, as well as insert my own. Another key skill for navigating the meet-ups was fluency in a second language, *even though* that language was not French. My French was good enough to order my drinks and make a few minutes of small talk, and that proved sufficient. In fact, because English was the common language at events, I did not *need* another language to communicate at the meet-ups; however, language competency was used to distinguish the ‘real’ internationals. Thus I frequently found myself relying on my fluency in Spanish to demonstrate my credentials. For example, this can be seen in the following excerpt from my field-notes about an Expat Paris luncheon:

The French-speaking women to my right were laughing about how they don't understand the Quebecois French accent and I brought up that the similar thing can happen to me when I travel in Latin American countries because I speak the Spanish-from-Spain. So then one of them said that she totally knew what I meant because she

is actually Argentine (married to a French guy) and she transitioned into Spanish and we just all started to speak in Spanish for a few minutes (ahh...felt so good after struggling with French) and then little French words were slipping into the Spanish and we went back into French. The French woman (the one married to a Canadian) complimented my Spanish accent and said it didn't sound 'American' at all. She went on for a bit about how horrible the American accent normally is (of course I felt proud). (Field-notes, September 5, 2008)

Many people in the international community go by a stereotype that Americans don't speak languages other than English, and so mastery of a second language, even though it was not French, proved helpful for gaining access to the 'internationals.' I felt this was particularly important in interviews with group organizers as I had these interviews early on in my fieldwork and wanted to gain their confidence in my presence as a researcher at their events. The following excerpt from my interview with one of the founders of International Events in Paris demonstrates how I highlighted language and living-abroad competencies to try to earn his respect as a 'global':

Marco: I would say that English-speaking people have a vision that is not totally the same, sometimes.

Erika: Do you think it's because the business world is already so much in English?

Marco: Yeah I think more or less, because that, *and* they don't feel at the beginning the necessity and the need to do it, and after awhile they say: 'Oh, I can't live like that, it's too difficult to do something else.' And then they stand [together] and do their things. Sometimes I go out with some English or American friends and they really – I mean we start speaking in French the

first three minutes because we have to order something, and after that they change to English. And I feel when you do that you can't really feel *in* the country.

Erika: My French is not very good. If I were here longer – I'll be here only three months – but if I were here longer it would definitely be one of my main objectives to become fluent. I lived in Madrid before and I'm fluent in Spanish. For me the most important thing I took away from the experience of Madrid was to become fluent...because of this, I have friends from there who are still my friends six years later, and those are the people who never leave. So it's good because if you speak the language, you can know people locally and then you always have a connection. Because if you only know expats then two years later, everybody is gone, and you don't even have a connection to the place anymore.

Marco: And especially because, yeah, you can live in the English-speaking part of the city but after awhile, a lot of these people are just [among] English-speaking people. They are not mixing with other nationalities. I mean, being expat is being *global*, is working with other nationalities, is feeling the other nationalities as well.

As is clear from this excerpt, part of being 'global' is having a flexible set of characteristics – such as language capabilities – to access the 'locals' (or at least some *version* of local other than your own) where one finds oneself living.

I began the research process as an ‘outsider’ – just like every other new meet-up attendee – but the regularity of my attendance, combined with the fact that I got to know the group organizers through the interview process, meant that soon I was somewhat of an ‘insider.’ This played out in a few interesting ways. Because of the interviews I was one of the few people at any event who had actually sat down and had a long personal conversation with organizers, and when I ran into them at events I sensed their genuine pleasure at seeing someone they ‘knew.’ (Even event organizers are often facing a roomful of strangers.) The ‘insider’ sense I developed certainly influenced how I navigated the events. For example, in the following excerpt from my field-notes, I am at the extremely crowded monthly Expat Paris gathering and find myself helping to ‘orient’ a newcomer, just as Aiden had once oriented me:

I manage to squeeze up to the bar and am next to (basically glued up against) a woman who seems to be nervous and by herself. I introduce myself and ask about her. She’s German, with the diplomatic corps, and has been posted to Paris for two years. This is not her first post out of the country – it is a career thing. She then asks me anxiously if I have seen David [the organizer]. I tell her that he is most likely here or on his way, but that it can be difficult to find him and talk to him very long at these events because there are so many people vying for his attention. She looks very disappointed and says, “but I emailed him.” Well, I know from our interview that almost every new person emails him and that it is impossible for him to make a personal connection with every new person at the event, so I try to calm her down (she is quite anxious about her need to find him – as if she can’t speak to anyone else or be legitimately there until she has done so). I tell her that to have a good, un-

rushed conversation with him it is better to go to the monthly luncheon where there are less people. Then I see him about a meter away (about 7 people crunched in between us!) and I point him out to her. She nods and makes a beeline toward him without saying goodbye (Field-notes, October 21, 2008).

For one event, I was even able to experience being an organizer myself. Marco asked me to help organize International Events in Paris' special party for Halloween, as it was an 'American holiday.' My assistance in the event included writing the invitation text, advising on which decorations to buy, helping to decorate, as well as 'working the entrance' with Claire (we were instructed by Marco to welcome people and, if they were alone, try to get them into conversations with a nearby group). An email notification sent out to the entire group about the event included a 'Thank You' to me for my help. In such ways, I felt like an 'insider.' On the other hand, I was conscious that when I attended events, I was 'working,' taking meticulous note of the environment, with whom I met, and what we spoke about. I could take comfort in the fact that whether or not I made deep social connections through 'the meet-up experience,' after three months I would return home to the security of my already-established circle of friends. This lack of 'need,' combined with the dimension of having a research objective through which I viewed the events, differentiated me from the group. That said, my closest friend in Paris became Claire, who I met at a meet-up, and there were many days in which, if it had not been for attending a meet-up, my only 'conversation' would have been with the lady from whom I bought baguettes around the corner from my apartment.

While I was easily integrated into the face-to-face meet-up scene in Paris, I found it more difficult to gain acceptance to the online community on InterNations. After 'lurking' on

the InterNations World Discussion Forum for months, I eventually decided to post my own question. I had watched many long, drawn-out forum discussions develop around key issues related to my research, so I assumed that my question would generate equal interest. I asked if the members who regularly use the discussion forum were *also* participating in the face-to-face aspect of InterNations, and if not, why? As required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I disclosed that I was asking the question as a part of my research, and said that I would not publish any person's response unless they gave me permission; I also, as required by the IRB, asked that people not respond if they were not 18 years of age or older.

Immediately a member emailed me with the following:

Subject: Hi, maybe a mistake in your thread :))

You wrote: Please do not participate if you are not 18 years old or older.

If you want some one answers, should correct it, there are some fake profiles around, that are trying to have some fun.....:))

Cheers,

S.

The online community had dealt with people using 'fake profiles' in connection with trying to begin relationships involving the sale of 'adult content', and in fact, I had seen discussions going around about this issue in the past. The IRB stipulation that I include an age requirement to participate resulted in my post looking as if it were one of these scams. On the one hand, the member who emailed me was trying to be helpful, and in this way I could see the hand reaching out, willing to usher me into the community (by teaching me about its norms). On the other hand, *no one* posted on my discussion thread. Two or three people emailed me *directly*, answering my question in the email, but were not willing to 'go

public' with their participation. This was the only situation in which institutional considerations seemed to get in the way of conducting my research project.

Ethics

The previous pages represent my attempts to situate myself in the ethnographic field. As should be clear from the project design, I attempted to create as much of a balance as possible by putting myself in the position of 'foreign professional' that in some ways placed me among participants in the study. I did not, however, try to 'blend in' at the expense of openness as to my intentions and position as 'researcher.' The ethical dilemmas I faced in this research were not those that could be accounted for through the IRB process – which had determined this project was 'Exempt' from board review because the population studied was not considered 'vulnerable.'

However, whenever one person has the power to write the story of another, and when the objective at hand is to 'get' that story, a level of vulnerability is still possible – even if the participant is willing, and cannot be politically, economically, or physically harmed by the research. Nicole Constable (2003), in her ethnography of online introduction services for American men and Asian women, discussed the ethical dilemma that arises around the fuzzy line of whether she is a *researcher* or *friend* to people she has interviewed, corresponded with, and participated in online forum discussions with over a period of three years. When an issue comes up on an online forum around whether or not she should be invited to attend a private face-to-face gathering of group members, and turns into a controversial debate, she posts the following message to the group:

Research and friendship are NOT necessarily incompatible! ...as I have become friends with people I have worked with in the past, it has created an even stronger sense of responsibility to represent them fairly... Yes, I'd be there as a researcher, but I am other things as well!! (Constable 2003: 54)

One difference between my project and Constable's is that she was observing a community where her presence was not intertwined with the *raison d'être* of the group (for example, she was not looking to get into a romantic relationship with one of the male participants). In my case, I met people at a social gathering for foreigners in Paris – of which I was one – and most had attended an event to seek friendship or other relationships along a spectrum of acquaintance to intimacy. And I too, while a researcher, was sometimes lonely in Paris and open to friendships or at least friendly conversations. My participation in *conversation* in general was exactly the *point* of participation in the group.

Also, compared to the somewhat superficial level of conversation at the events, the hour-long one-on-one conversations of the interviews could feel quite intimate. Perhaps it's often the case that a bond develops through the interview process, but I believe the effect was magnified here in that the interviews often involved people who were lacking a local emotional support group. Sometimes people I interviewed would later email or call, inviting me to meet on another occasion for a coffee or drink, and herein came the ethical dilemma. When was I 'working' and when was I socializing? (This is one of the problems of researching your 'own backyard'). I dealt with this issue by directing all social connections made through the research *back* into the research field. So, for example, if someone I had interviewed asked me if I wanted to hang out next week, I would say: "I'm going to the *Apero* on Tuesday – let's meet there." In fact, I learned that this was a way in which *many*

people used the meet-ups. Habitual attendees, after arriving alone a few times, tended to develop a circle of ‘meet-up friends’ with whom they coordinated which events to attend each week.

Ethics: Who Should Be Studied?

Constable (2003) points out that a discussion of ethics should also reflect on who is left out of research, and why. The people who make up this study are not the only migrants in Paris. By focusing on meet-ups for the ‘international community,’ I by no means want to indicate that this group is the more relevant or important of migrant groups. In fact, immigration has been a controversial issue in France in recent years, mostly tied to migrant groups that are *not* accounted for in this project.

While the percentage of foreign-born in France has not actually increased much in past decades years – remaining almost steady at between 6 and 6.5% since the 1930s – “the main nationality groups in France’s foreign population have changed dramatically,” with more people coming from Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa (Thomas 2006:26). As such, Hargreaves points out that for the most part, what the French call ‘immigration’ is actually referring to ‘race relations’ (in Thomas 2006:26). After a long period of ignoring ‘difference’ French scholars are finally exploring how the long-heralded ideology of the ‘universal’ republican citizen is now seen as having allowed deep institutional racism to be ignored and unaddressed. For example, Laforcade (2006) argues that France’s role in constructing its ethnic ‘Others’ through the colonial and postcolonial experience should be included into public discourse and educational curricula, and Harding (2006) stresses the need for the French media to reflect the multiethnic composition of the country. At the forefront of these

efforts, the Institut Français de Presse at the Université Paris II has a team of professors and graduate students dedicated to researching immigrants and media (representation, use, and production) in France.

My choice to focus on migrants that for the most part exist outside of this more serious and perhaps activist-engaging sphere is not a political statement, but a theoretical one. As I discussed in the introduction, I identified the so-called ‘international community’ as a group that remains understudied at the nexus of migration and media, despite the implications of post-national or other post-modern forms of attachment that underlie much research at that intersection. The way this group (loose-knit as it may be), made up mainly of expatriates and other ‘privileged migrants’, utilizes the Internet to come together as a population called the ‘international community’ provides insights into new modes of living, identifying, and belonging in an era of globalization.

Conclusion

George Marcus (1995) advises that in spite of encouragement for anthropologists to study their own backyard, these new ethnographic fields should not be seen in isolation:

It is a mistake to understand multi-sited ethnography, as it sometimes has been, as merely adding perspectives peripherally to the usual subaltern focus—e.g., adding perspectives on elites and institutions, or “studying up” for mere completeness.

Rather, this kind of ethnography maps a new object of study in which previous situating narratives like that of resistance and accommodation become qualified by expanding what is ethnographically “in the picture” of research. (p. 85)

The stories I have chosen to tell through this ethnographic project do not simply provide another side of the coin, but become an integral part of an overall picture of financial, social and cultural globalization; the ecology of transnational corporations and global cities; links between migration and new media technologies; an increasing individualization or sense of lives lived as entrepreneurial projects; and, through it all, a continuing human need to *connect* to others.

To draw a picture of this ‘phenomenon’ and related meanings, I utilize a combination of online and offline ethnographic methods to study the Paris international community. I attempt to comprehend this community in terms of its on- and offline realms *both* as part of a holistic field of study *and* as separate fields of inquiry. The online component of the research utilizes methods that are drawn from Critical Discourse Analysis, and inspired by suggestions for tackling inquiry of online communities ethnographically, which have been recently developed (e.g. Hine 2000; Johns et al 2004; Hine 2005). These interpretive methods are informed by theoretical perspectives in the areas of new media and migration, communications technologies and community studies, postmodern and postcolonial theories, theories of identity, and theories of globalization, which will be drawn out in following chapters. The next chapter sets the scene for this study, with a look at the online and offline contexts in which it was conducted.

Chapter Three

Context: Global Paris and ‘The International Community’

I think mostly the people who live here – who have lived here for awhile – they were born here, they have their friends from school, they have their little network. They don’t need me in their network. And of course I arrive, and then all the expatriates they are going through the same situation, they’re in the same position: they’re looking for *people*... I’ve heard from a lot of French people that Paris is a passing-through city. They meet someone, you get along well, you become friends, and then two months, three months later, the person’s gone again. And some of them have said that they’re getting tired of just always investing time and then the person leaves.

- Martina, from Germany

I heard about meet-ups, I think, after about the first year I arrived here... I think it was a good thing to know because...in Paris, it’s a bit difficult to meet people anyway. I mean the French are – it’s a bit difficult to enter some circles. So with the internationals, it’s easier because there are lots of nationalities and you can uh... well it’s made a difference. Yeah. I mean I met some nice people. I have some friends from ‘Internationals’ and so through that I felt more connected, maybe, to Paris.

- Kata, from Cyprus

If there is such thing as a global public imagination, Paris looms large within it. It is the most visited city in the world and a frequent star of the silver screen, providing the backdrop for 730 film shoots per year (*Mairie de Paris* 2009a). For centuries, the city has been a leader in specific pleasures such as fashion and food, and hailed for an abstract and diffuse *joie de vivre* and as the capital of romance. David Harvey (2003) calls Paris the ‘capital of modernity’ and notes the city’s role in the development of the enlightenment philosophies that provided the moral basis for democratic governance.

Paris today is an important hub for global business circuits in which English is the corporate language and through which information, media, finances, products, and labor flow

from all regions of the globe. It is not only important in a global network of cities, but also as the leading urbanity in continental Europe. And whether attracting people for work, art, study, refuge, or lifestyle, Paris has long been a storied crossroads for people of many backgrounds¹⁵. Yet it has also been a site of friction between an imagined authentic ‘inside’ and its constituting outside, and such tensions live on today between the city’s local and global ambitions.

Paris at the Crossroads of Local and Global

The official website for the *Mairie de Paris* (2009b) clearly underscores the city government’s attempts to situate Paris as a global, rather than simply French, capital. The English-language version of the site prominently displays links such as ‘Foreign Residents’ and ‘Paris, a city with an international profile¹⁶’, the latter of which links to a page of international cultural and research exchanges, as well as to information on multiple global alliances in which Paris plays a key role. For example, the United Cities and Local Governments organization (UCLG) was founded in Paris in 2004 and is highlighted in many sections of the website. A description of the organization reads:

Representing more than half the world's population, the member cities and associations of the UCLG are present in more than 120 Member States of the United Nations and in the eight regions of the globe... More than 1,000 cities are members...The organization is the only spokesperson for cities, to provide concrete solutions to the challenges of globalization and urban growth. UCLG is based on

¹⁵ E.g. Paris was the cosmopolitanism site of the ‘black internationalist’ and ‘Negritude’ movements that were important for bringing black peoples together from around the world to create an anti-colonial and anti-racist politics and art. (Edwards 2003; Peabody & Stovall 2003; Walters 2005).

¹⁶ Interestingly, a link within that section called ‘international capital’ is named “Paris métropole” on the French-language version, connecting the city’s claims of global citizenship to its imperial past.

three principles: democracy, local self-government and decentralized cooperation at the service of citizens. The network is the main representative of local governments at the United Nations. (*Mairie de Paris 2009c*)

The focus of UCLG on linking cities around the world based on shared interests (including those of their ‘citizens’) outside of national frameworks is indicative of important economic and political changes that have occurred in recent decades, which have somewhat distanced cities from their national cohorts.

This changing role of cities is explored through a large body of work on ‘global cities’ (Sassen 1991) and ‘world cities’ (Taylor & Walker 2001), which posits that urban centers around the world have become networked, or interconnected, to each other while becoming less (or differently) connected to their national and regional economies. Saskia Sassen (2002) explains that “the massive trends toward the *spatial dispersal of economic activities* at the metropolitan, national, and global levels that we associate with globalization have contributed to a demand for new forms of *territorial centralization of top-level management and control functions*” (p. 4, emphases added). As manufacturing and raw material extraction are territorially expanded (*dispersal*), the complexity of transnational corporate expansion has led to an accompanying demand for ‘producer services’ in areas such as accounting, advertising and public relations, law, management consulting, software design, graphic design and printing (Sassen 2006). These producer service firms, themselves highly networked, are concentrated in cities (*centralization*) that are connected around the world through cross-border networks of “technology, business transactions, firms’ affiliates, and airline travel” (Sassen 2002:14).

While Sassen's model considers Paris as a 'second-tier global city' in a hierarchy that puts New York, London and Tokyo at the top, other studies from this literature give Paris a more prominent position. For example, the Globalization and World Cities Research Group, which determines the 'global capacity' of 'world cities' by mapping intercity networking based on location strategies of firms and affiliates in accountancy, advertising, banking/finance, and law, lists Paris *alongside* London, New York, and Tokyo as the top scoring 'Alpha World Cities' (Taylor & Walker et al. 2002).

Other studies also consider Paris a key city in the global circuit. For example, in the 2008 Global Cities Index produced through collaboration among *Foreign Policy*, A.T. Kearney, and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, Paris was ranked in the third place, behind just New York and London. The accompanying *Foreign Policy* report criticized other global indices for an overwhelming focus on economic or financial ties, and argued that because *their* ranking considered "measures of cultural, social, and policy indicators," it provided "a more complete picture of a city's global standing" (Foreign Policy, Nov./Dec. 2008: 1). In that report, Paris ranked first among all cities in the subcategory called 'Information Exchange,' which measures "how well news and information is dispersed about and to the rest of the world" (p. 1). Finally, in the Urban Land Institute's Global City Index Report (Reuters, Nov. 18, 2008), London and New York reign but are said to face 'competition' from other cities, including Paris. While London and New York lead a category in that index called 'Global Economic Reach' (followed by Paris, Tokyo, and Chicago), in the 'Investment and Fiscal' category London loses to Paris and New York; and Paris is the overall winner in the 'Image and Attractiveness' category.

In the race for ‘global city’ status (which for densely located European cities also means a race for foreign investment), ‘image and attractiveness’ is an area where Paris cannot afford to lose ground¹⁷. The designed environment of the city and its contribution to quality of life is an area of contestation that illuminates tensions around Paris’ goal of ‘globalism’ and fervor for ‘localism.’

One of the first areas these tensions materialize is through the commercial landscape of the city. Whether walking down a grand boulevard or a *petite rue*, one can now easily find Starbucks coffee shops, packed with a mix of French and foreign students, and nestled among the more traditional café-bars with their tobacco counters and perennial clientele of retired gentlemen reading *Le Figaro* and discussing politics or football/soccer. It’s not just a simple generational divide, however; many younger Parisians still refuse to enter a Starbucks, seeing it as an abhorrent symbol of globalization¹⁸. City Hall recently reached the tipping point regarding this encroachment of global chain stores when it banned the giant Swedish clothing company H&M from opening a ‘megastore’ on the Champs Elysées; Deputy mayor Francois Lebel warned it would be the first of many attempts to slow the ‘banalization’ and over-commercialization of the avenue (Sciolino 2007).

Managing the cityscape and planning for a 21st century Paris is envisioned by government and business leaders alike as a crucial task. Two million residents live within the 41-square-mile city limits – an area about 15 times smaller than Greater London – with

¹⁷ In light of Paris’ losing the 2025 Olympics to London, an article in *The Economist* goes on to say that Paris and London are now competing “for investment, besides the more intangible qualities of inventiveness and style that make a ‘world city’ in the global mind” (*The Economist*, Mar. 15, 2008:2).

¹⁸ Paris is home to a passionate anti-globalization movement, which is particularly strong among students – who frequently, and famously, take to the streets in protest against potential policies that seem too much associated with neo-liberal capitalism, globalization, or the Americanization of France.

another 8.5million people in the suburbs (*The Economic Times*, June 12, 2008). A 22-mile long, eight-lane beltway encircles the Paris periphery, creating a physical and psychological barrier between the city and its greater urban area (Vienne 2008:1). The French President, Nicholas Sarkozy “has declared a priority to reshape Paris for the 21st century: to attract investors, preserve the environment and build bridges with the capital’s poor, restive suburbs” (*The Economic Times*, June 12, 2008:1). Just how to do this has become a political battle with two separate proposals; one from the Republic’s centre-right Sarkozy, who says he wants to create a ‘Greater Paris,’ and another from the city’s socialist mayor, Bertrand Delanoë, who talks of a ‘Paris Métropole’ (*The Economist*, March 15, 2008:2).

Sarkozy has created a ministerial position dedicated to soliciting architectural and city planning visions for making Paris a “global city, open and dynamic, attractive, a creator of wealth and jobs” (*The Economic Times*, June 12, 2008:1). The move is discussed by *The Economic Times* as imperative to Paris’ future economic viability: “As the world’s major cities ‘hunt to attract the best,’ the fight to draw investors is especially fierce within Europe, where workers and capital can move easily from one country to the next” (ibid, p. 1). And this one is Paris’ to lose: According to a 2005 survey by PricewaterhouseCoopers, the Paris urban area was Europe’s biggest ‘city economy’ (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2005).

The Paris mayor, Delanoë, on the other hand, is more focused on promoting projects that improve the *quality of life* of city residents, and is “less supportive of projects that flaunt the vitality of corporations and financial institutions eager to pitch towering office buildings inside Paris” (Vienne, 2008:2).

In many ways the argument comes down to whether Paris can maintain global city status while holding onto the ‘*je ne sais quoi*’ that defines its local particularity. In hailing the

‘superiority’ of London over Paris, *The Economist* cites London’s openness to change and outside influences as that city’s secret ingredient: “These days, there is nothing particularly British about London, bar its tolerance of chaos. It has embraced globalization to become an international city, while Paris has remained unapologetically French” (March 15, 2008:2).

The city’s 310,000 foreign residents may know this all too well. Paris’ history as a former colonial métropole, combined with its contemporary position as a key hub in a global circuit of capital, services, and labor, has drawn many new types of migrants and led to changes in the cultural landscape of the city. Migrants are temporary and ‘permanent’, legally sanctioned and not, coming from around the world.

A key part of the Maastricht Treaty that set the groundwork for an integrated European Union with a common currency was a commitment to improving the ‘free movement of workers’ so that EU citizens could work across borders in all member states. Since the treaty’s ratification in 1992, working across Europe has become increasingly simplified (for example, with the 2004 launch of EuroPass, which organizes each person’s professional qualifications into a uniform template). According to City Hall, ‘foreigners’ make up 14% of Paris’ total population: Out of this population, 30% are from other EU member states and 26% are North Africans or Turks (these statistics do not count people who have taken French citizenship), meaning 44% of Paris’ foreign residents are from outside the EU, North Africa and Turkey (*Mairie de Paris* 2009d).

While the Parisian government may seek to extend beyond the city’s ‘Frenchness’ to assert leadership in a political, economic and cultural sphere of global cities, foreign-born residents and citizens in the city note a counter-reality: their societal marginalization in the

face of a deeply entrenched localism¹⁹. Indeed, one of the biggest ironies at work in Paris is the celebrated discourse about universal citizenship set against the Parisians' reputation for disdaining outsiders. As Roman Polansky famously put it, "In Paris, one is always reminded of being a foreigner. If you park your car wrong, it is not the fact that it's on the sidewalk that matters, but the fact that you speak with an accent" (wikiquote.org).

During my fieldwork, participants frequently referred to the closed-off nature of French people as partially driving the need to find alternative social outlets. For example, in the quotes at the top of this chapter, Martina and Kata both refer to their initial efforts to gain access to local society and how the sense of a barrier to that world then led them to seek out the expatriate or international community via the online portals. Many other people said the same; for example, Alice, from South America and the US, explained:

For me, meet-up is so practical just because they do so much more [than other sites]. And I think it's a very well built site – like from a computer and Internet user perspective. And for me it was very important because here in Paris, I mean, I don't find... I find the French in general very difficult, to make friends.

At the same time, while meet-ups provide meeting grounds for an 'international community' to come together, they are also a place where a *local* Paris is accessed and imagined. For example, Joanna – an Expats Paris member – writes on her profile: "I would like to meet other expats to enjoy Paris together." This kind of statement is incredibly common on the profiles. And as Kata says in the quote at the top of this chapter: "I have some friends from Internationals and so through that I felt more connected, maybe, to Paris."

¹⁹ Such exclusions are apparent in their most severe sense in relation to the deep-rooted, structural racism that permeates the lives of non-white immigrants and their French-born descendents, recently explored in the aftermath of rioting by minority youth in the ghettoized Parisian suburbs in 2005 (Laforcade 2006; Harding 2006; Amiraux & Simon 2006).

Thus the international meet-ups that I studied did *not* emerge solely as *global* forums where people would meet to discuss their worldly travels and desires. Rather, a large part of the utility of the meet-ups was that they allowed people who felt ‘disconnected’ (e.g. did not have friends) in Paris to meet others in similar situations, and to then make plans to enjoy the city and explore the culture. At the same time, not only were many of the participants in the same situation currently (in Paris); many of them had had previous migration and/or travel experiences and could draw on these more ‘global’ perspectives to find commonality (practices that will be discussed at length in Chapter Five). In this way, the international meet-ups served as spaces characterized by both the local and the global – just as I have suggested of Paris itself. These spaces were predominantly ‘corporate’ in character, not only because so many meet-up attendees were employees of corporations, but also because of the design and location of locales. Importantly, while many attendees were in Paris because of careers, I did not find evidence that these corporations provided adequate social spaces for these employees. This is particularly problematic in light of the immense (and expensive) efforts that corporations make to aid the integration of *married* employees who move with their families. The lack of corporate support for single professionals to create international social spaces indicates the extent to which such employees are noted not only to be more flexible than the traditional expats, but also much more of a ‘bargain.’ It also indicates how people are increasingly expected to *build their own networks*, even as these networks benefit their companies. This issue will be discussed further in the concluding chapter. The next section discusses how this local and global ‘corporate’ crossroads is created voluntarily through both the online and offline formats as a ‘transnational social space’ in Paris.

A 'Rhetorical', 'Transnational Social Space'

As Martina says in her quote at the top of the chapter, Paris is a “passing-through city”; indeed, for *many* people the city is experienced as a transit space, or what Marc Augé (1995) calls *non-place*:

The word ‘non-place’ designates two complementary but distinct realities: spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relations that individuals have with these places... As anthropological places create the organically social, so non-places create solitary contractuality. (p. 94)

For Augé, the non-place, an inherent part of what he calls supermodernity, refers to time spent ‘outside of territory’ – in airport terminals, supermarkets, or highways, etc. The experience of non-place is individualizing, which he explains through an example of how, when arriving at an airport, a person becomes a *passenger*, and must have a ticket embedded with the requisite individual information. Augé draws on Vincent Descombes to think through the challenge of when a person can be ‘at home’ in supermodernity – an answer is found in a rhetorical rather than geographical definition:

Where is the character at home? The question bears less on a geographical territory than a rhetorical territory... The character is at home when he is at ease in the rhetoric of the people with whom he shares his life. The sign of being at home is the ability to make oneself understood without too much difficulty, and to follow the reasoning of others without the need for long explanations. (Descombes 1987: 179 in Augé 1995: 108)

Cut off from the ‘local’ Paris, many foreign residents experience the city as a transit space (a ‘passing through city’ as Martina said). While perhaps a non-place, it is not *just* a

space of moving bodies passing each other. These people live/reside within the deterritorialized non-place and thereby must seek out emotional connections to find meaning within it and create a sense of home and place.

The ‘international community’ in Paris is a ‘rhetorical space’: the conglomerated effect of online archives, online discourse (with use of words such as ‘we,’ ‘the international community’, and ‘the international people’), consistency in face-to-face venues, frequent email notifications, etc. This all contributes to a *language*, a sense of *continuity*, a feeling of *knowing*, and a set of *routine practices*, which make up a space called ‘the international community’. While in many ways the transitory nature of this ‘community’ could lend it to be classified by Augé as non-place, the way the space is used *affectively* by many participants infuses the ‘community’ with more meaning than the connotation of non-place would suggest.

Before the move from geographical to ‘social’ space (e.g. Lefebvre 1991), ‘place’ was considered that which had meaning while ‘space’ was that which was devoid of it. In his book, *Place: A Short Introduction*, Cresswell (2004) references Yi Fu Tuan’s 1977 equation of space with *movement*, and place with *pause*. With the conceptual move from physical to social conceptions of space, however, Cresswell points out that “*socially produced space... in many ways, plays the same role as place*” (2004: 10, emphases added). Socially produced spaces are liberated from geographic location while still acknowledged to hold meanings and representations for users. This theoretical move opened up a realm for thinking about *transnational* social spaces in relation to new forms of international migration. Pries (1999) points out that these *transnational social spaces*,

are spatially diffuse or pluri-local, at the same time comprising social space that is not *exclusively* transitory. The social space serves as an important frame of reference for social positions and positioning and also determines everyday practices, biographical employment projects, and human identities, simultaneously pointing beyond the social context of national societies. (p. 26, emphasis added)

Pries also suggested that the ability to combine ‘virtual’ and ‘imagined’ sites adds to the ability to extend social space beyond geography.

I envision the international community as that which is constituted by the rhetorical and discursive strategies developed by those who operate in that space to negotiate both their global ‘condition’ and the local Paris. The meet-ups are a way to have contact with bodies – approved bodies, invested with the cultural capital of global-mindedness (e.g. languages, travel experiences, certain taken-for-granted political affects, a certain amount of local knowledge, and the adaptability and flexibility necessary for cocktail party conversation with strangers from different countries); this contact is drawn on in order to *feel* a connection. That the group host –importantly, a human being – utilizes the Internet as a tool but acts personally as the hub of organization of this space is of crucial importance as a representation of personal connection. All of this will be discussed in later chapters but is summarized here to allude to how the ‘international community’ is constituted. The following ethnographic descriptions explain the spaces that make up the ‘international community’ in global Paris.

Portals to an Offline World

On a ‘*google*’ search, in addition to the many articles or blogs by and about foreigners living in Paris and the many sites that provide relocation advice and assistance, one can also find a

variety of options that promise to lead to face-to-face activities with other foreigners, whether co-nationals or ‘internationals’. As explained in the introduction, I focused my search on groups that were purposely non-national in their constitution: I found dozens. When I sorted them out for free-to-attend events, relatively open access membership²⁰, and *general* social activities (rather than, for example, a specific ‘museum lovers’ group), I was left with seven groups, four of which were hosted on Meetup.com.

Meet-up.com

Meet-up is an interactive, template-based website that acts as a portal to user-organized offline events in localities around the world. According to its corporate website, the company’s “mission is to revitalize local community and help people around the world self-organize” (meetup.com/about). As of Winter 2009, over 46,000 meet-up groups existed in 3600 cities around the world, making it “the world’s largest network of local groups” (meetup.com/about). Joining a meet-up is usually free – although some charge a fee, this is at the discretion of each group founder and is not the norm. For between \$12 and \$19 per month, depending on length of commitment, any person with Internet access, an email address and a valid credit card can start her own group, in any location, organized around almost any theme.

At the meetup.com homepage, visitors are invited to either “Find a Meetup” or “Start a Meetup.” Selecting “Start a Meetup,” I am taken to a screen that requires me to select an overall topic area for my new group before I can continue the process. As I begin to type

²⁰ InterNations.org and the Horn’s Club both required I submit a brief explanation of why I wanted to join the group, but this seemed a mere formality. While I’m certain that it would be possible for someone to be rejected through that process, they did not require any sort of proof of identity nor a referral from a current member (as does the exclusive ‘A Small World,’ which will be discussed in Chapter Five).

‘expatriate,’ a list comes up that includes the general title, Expat, but also has Expat-American, Expat-French, British-Expats, Expat-Canadian, Expat-Italian, Expat-Indian, Expat-Brazilian, Expat-German, Expat-Spanish, and Expat-Chinese. Choosing the general Expat takes me to a screen where I should input information about my new group such as its name, location (country and city), and a brief group description, as well as personal information that will allow me to login in and manage the page. A small text-box is provided wherein I may type a description of the group, but I find that the box already includes a standard explanation connected to this topic, which I may choose to maintain or override. It reads: “Meet with other local Expats, regardless of nationality. Expats of all nationalities often have a lot in common. Everyone is welcome!” To proceed, I must also check a box wherein I “Pledge that I will try to create real face-to-face community.” At that point, I am asked to pay. Electing not to, I stop there²¹. Had I continued, I would have been able to create the mini-website for my group by filling out a template wherein certain content is fixed and other is open. Although navigation headings are pre-determined (About Us, Calendar, Members, etc), within each page a predetermined number of headings and accompanying body text may be customized. A mini-website for my group would then have been included in the meet-up.com searchable index.

If I select to “Find a MeetUp” rather than start one, I am able to specify that I would like to find groups in or near Paris, France. I must then select from a list of popular topics, including categories such as alternative health, parenting, music, and science –among these, ‘expatriates.’ Becoming a member of any group is a matter of creating an overall account with MeetUp, which simply entails providing a name, a ‘username’, and a valid email

²¹ Twelve hours after I have abandoned the process of starting a new group, I receive an email from MeetUp offering me 50% off the group fee if I will continue with the registration.

address. Once a member, I can join any meet-up by clicking on the prominently displayed “Join us!” box on each group homepage. I can then view the times, dates, and places of events/activities occurring in physical space; I may also elect to receive email notifications of events.

Landing pages of the group mini websites have a welcoming tone aimed at the single person who may be alone in the city, and encouraging new members to join and attend events with assurances that they can feel comfortable arriving alone. Front and center on each group’s page is an overview paragraph that welcomes the visitor and explains a bit about the group identity and goals. This is followed by a standard set of basic statistics (e.g. ‘number of members’ and ‘number of meet-ups so far’) and then a set of group-member quotes that are randomly generated from participant-provided feedback after events – an interesting function in that sometimes these unfiltered, front-and-center quotes are critical of or complaining about the group! Each group homepage also has a photo and name of the founder; a link to a calendar of events; a list of related meet-ups; a column of snapshots from the profiles of ‘recent new members’; a link to RSS Feeds for new event information; and a few advertisements.

Prominently displayed on each group’s homepage is an announcement of the next upcoming event. Members can click on a tab to RSVP that s/he will ‘yes,’ ‘no,’ or ‘maybe’ attend the event, and the list of RSVPs can be seen by all members. Thus not only is it possible to see how many people (along with their names and profile pictures) are planning to attend an event, but after the party is over it is also possible to return to the RSVP list to ‘look up’ someone whose acquaintance has been made, and even contact him/her via the direct email function.

As meetup.com is characterized by the user-interactivity of Web 2.0²², members contribute to the content through interaction with the template options. For example, each member (on each group site) is assigned a profile page where s/he may elect to post personal information, as well as provide answers to the template questions (e.g. “where are you from?”) and upload photos or files (all optional); members may also create or contribute to discussion forums, and contact each other directly through email or ‘shout-outs’ – messages posted publicly on another member’s profile page. On member profiles is a list of ‘other meet-ups’ that s/he has joined; from this feature, it is clear that most members have joined at least ten other meet-ups; some have joined as many as fifteen or twenty.

I set out to participate/observe the following four groups from meet-up.com. Below is a set of general information compiled about the groups:

Expats Paris

- One founder/organizer and seven assistant organizers (from six countries)
- 2090 registered members (as of Winter 2009)
- Events: Monthly weeknight gathering at an Irish pub; Monthly luncheon at a pizzeria; Additional events planned by co-organizers at their discretion (normally at least one per week, usually something cultural – wine tasting, opera, etc).

²² Web 2.0 is the term created to describe the ‘second generation’ of Internet usability wherein users may participate interactively in developing and uploading content. Key to the format is that people may participate in creating content even though they do not have knowledge of web-based code. Matt Nelson, an IT consultant with TowerGroup says that Web 2.0 is simply, “the use of lightweight, intuitive, Web-based services that rely on user participation and user-contributed data, and generally involve some sort of social interaction and networking” (Kendler, July 1, 2007: 46). For example, YouTube, Wikipedia, and Facebook are all web applications that would be considered 2.0, while a site where a user could only receive information but not contribute to its content would be a more traditional, ‘first generation’ website. Important for this project, Jae-young (May 23, 2007) points out that Web 2.0 blurs the “boundary between online and offline” (p. 1).

International Events in Paris

- Four co-organizers (from three countries)
- 1950 registered members (as of Winter 2009)
- Events: Weekly weeknight gathering at a series of locations rotating among five or six bars; Occasional weekend parties at clubs or on a river barge.

The Paris New-in-Town Meet-up Group

- One organizer and two assistant organizers (from two countries)
- 1150 registered members (as of Winter 2009)
- Events: Once a month; venue and activity ranges from a night at a bar to neighborhood walks/tours.

INC: International Nomad Community

- One organizer
- 345 registered members (as of Winter 2009)
- Events: Once or twice a month (at the discretion of the organizer), normally on a Saturday night, in a rotating location (always a bar or pub).

At first glance, the groups seemed rather similar; and many people are registered members of all or many of the groups. However, when I actually began to participate in the face-to-face events, it became quickly apparent that ‘Expats Paris’ and ‘International Events in Paris’ were more consistently active than the other two, and had a much larger and committed group of attendees. Of the three months I spent in Paris, two months passed without a single event planned by ‘Paris New-in-Town’, and when the group finally did organize something, it was a Sunday walk through a neighborhood, for which less than ten people RSVP’d. When I began the initial research online a year earlier this group had been

much more active, but rumor had it that a change in organizer-leadership had corresponded with a decline in activity. ‘International Nomad Community’ was inconsistent in a different way – it met only once in October and November, but three times in December. Typically its events received less than ten ‘yes’ RSVPs. I was only able to attend one of that group’s meet-ups, at which there were only four people (including myself and the organizer).

Thus, of the general/social meetup.com groups for people of all nationalities, ‘Expats Paris’ and ‘International Events in Paris’ emerged as the more dynamic and successful, and this is where I focused the majority of my attention. Their events occurred with regularity and were nearly always packed wall-to-wall with people. In spite of a high ‘turnover’ in attendees, and the fact that events were so full of people that it was impossible to meet and speak with more than the tiniest fraction, I noticed that after just one week of events, I began to run into people that I had met or noticed previously. With some of them, I joined in conversation each time, and with others I just exchanged a friendly wave and ‘hello’; it did not take long at all to develop a comfort level wherein I would enter a gathering and notice at least a few familiar faces dotting the crowd.

Meet-ups were always set apart and distinguished from areas frequented by local clientele. This was accomplished either physically – through reserved areas set apart in the basement, upstairs, mezzanine, or ‘cave’ area of a restaurant or bar – or symbolically, such as at the river barge parties where meet-up attendees are given a blue plastic bracelet and told to find other people wearing the same, or in a large club off of the Champs Elysees where meet-up partygoers are given gold bracelets to identify themselves to each other and to the bartenders who would then give a small discount on drinks. On the other hand, the web-language promoting meet-ups tended to accentuate the *local-ness* of venues. Take, for

example, this invitation from Expats Paris on Tuesday, November 4th. I have underlined the local references and double-underlined the global references to highlight their juxtaposition:

What: International drink

When: Tuesday, November 4, 2008 7:30 PM

Who: At least 7 Expats. Still room for 43 more

Where: CHARLIE BIRDY

1, Place Etienne Pernet 75015

Metro commerce-ligne 8

Hello everybody!! Here we are back again at CHARLIE BIRDY for another international drink. This awesome lounge-bar is located in the "quartier du commerce" (15th arrondissement), away from traffic and city center's mess. Lots of local Parisians like it for its ethnic-lounge atmosphere and trendy-world food cuisine.

The first floor is being reserved for us on Tuesday 04 Nov at 7:30 pm, so we can socialize and enjoy ourselves. If you have questions, email me at x@expatsparis.com or call me at 06 XX XX XX.

So, come and meet other internationally wandering people and share your stories!

Another way the community as a social space is created is related to the fact that because many meet-up groups serve an overlapping population, many participants attend multiple events and do not remember which group is associated with each. This is illustrated in an excerpt from an interview I had with Phoebe, a professional nanny from the United Kingdom who had been living in Paris and attending meet-ups regularly for over one year. Here, we are talking about how one meet-up seems to have more French members than

others, but I am trying to figure out if we are talking about the same group. I cannot tell because she is conflating the names of the two main groups, Expats Paris and International Events in Paris:

Phoebe: But it's very hard to get integrated.

Erika: Well, it does seem like some of the groups are more, have more French. The one, International Events...

Phoebe: Yes. And Expats International – they have, they've got French.

Erika: The Expats Paris one or the International Events?

Phoebe: I think Expats International – the one that's run by Marc and...

Erika: Yeah, yeah... International Events.

While organizers think of their groups as individual and specific, the participants themselves seem to experience a conglomerated effect, which they tend to associate with 'the meet-ups' or 'the international community.' This effect is pronounced by the fact that many of the other groups, which are discussed below, do not actually organize their *own* events in Paris. Rather, they tend to partner with meet-up groups or use their web space to promote specific expat-oriented events being hosted by other organizations.

InterNations.org

"Make the world your home," reads the bold invitation on the launch page of InterNations.org, a website that is a hybrid of 'online community' and offline events, and declares itself dedicated to "connecting global minds." InterNations is unique among the sites I studied in that its 'local events' function is just one part of a larger, global project. While the purpose of meet-up.com is to "use the Internet to get off the Internet" (meetup.com),

InterNations has an online component that equals or surpasses its offline function.

Membership is free, but prospective members must fill out a form with a brief explanation responding to: “Why you would like to join InterNations. E.g. what makes you a global mind; your international background; or your professional or private experiences abroad.” (In the following chapters I will discuss various issues related to such ‘gates’ to entry). Once admitted to the group, a member may fill out a profile and must choose a current location from the list of “over 100 international capitals and major cities” where InterNations has an active local presence; the local time and weather forecast for that city is then always present at the top of the site when a member is ‘logged in.’

InterNations is ‘global’ in that people located in cities around the world participate in user-generated forum discussions accessible to all members; can access other member profiles; and can become ‘friends’ with other members irrespective of location, so long as the other member agrees to be ‘connected.’ An area called ‘my network’ then collects these ‘friends’ in one section on the site; any member can email any other member, regardless of if they are ‘connected’.

The site is ‘local’ in that each city has ‘ambassadors’ who are asked to plan events and be open to receiving emails from members with questions about the local ‘community.’ A section of the website marked by the name of a member’s local city – in my case, Paris – prominently displays photos and messages from these ambassadors. Each local page also includes: a local forum where any member can post or respond to a ‘discussion thread’; an ‘events’ area where any member can invite others to, or promote, an upcoming event; a local directory with a range of information helpful for tourists (such as restaurants, sightseeing places, and shopping) as well as for foreign residents (such as daycares and schools, medical

facilities, and fitness centers); and finally, a list of local members and access to their profiles. If planning to visit another city, members can access that city's page online to contact other members, look for events, and check out the local directory.

Somewhat confusingly, in Paris the InterNations ambassadors are *also* the co-organizers of the meet-up group, Expats Paris. Because of this, the main InterNations local events are tied in with the Expats Paris events – the two websites act as different portals for accessing the *same social scene*. The case is similar for Horn's Club and Kunveno.com.

Horn's Social Club & Kunveno.com

The Horn's Club is set up to be an 'online community' with an email message area, member profiles, and events calendars. Just like in InterNations, prospective members must apply for free membership by filling out an online form. Once a member fills out his/her profile information, it becomes part of a static background catalogue of other profiles, and there is little-to-no interactivity in the web content. The website's owners/managers send out a weekly email with a list of events in Paris that they believe will appeal to the membership – many of these events are expensive, such as the *Grand Bal de Paris*, or trips to the polo grounds.

The Horn's Club event that I attended – on two separate occasions – was a free-entry monthly pub gathering that I did not realize at the time was organized for employees who work for embassies and related organizations of 'OECD countries.'²³ This was straight from the Horn's Club modus operandi: to publicize other groups' events as their own; however, because they are not clear about this on their website, I traipsed around a bar alone for at

²³ Basically an organization for wealthy countries: The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, or OECD, "brings together the governments of countries committed to democracy and the market economy from around the world" (oecd.org).

least a half an hour asking people “Are you with the Horn’s Club?” – getting blank stares in return – until I finally found a group of three international bankers who had also been led by the web text to believe there was an actual Horn’s Club ‘community’ meeting at the bar. We drank a beer together but never found anyone else associated with the club. The second time I tried to attend the event, I took a friend; together, we again went around the bar asking about the group and getting no response. That time we did not find anybody, and I never returned. Soon afterwards, however, the Horn’s Club began publicizing the Expats Paris monthly cocktail, and this is when I finally realized that events publicized were not unique to the organization.

Kunveno is even less active or *present* than the Horn’s Club. The site claims to provide a “club where internationally minded people can feel at home” (kunveno.com) but upon closer inspection, there is no real site for that club, online or off. There are no member profiles or lists (except lists that advertisers can buy directly from the site owners – but these are not accessible by other members as profiles); in fact, there is no interactivity of any kind on the website, and no Kunveno-specific events. Rather, the content of the ‘events’ page reads: “Kunveno is joining InterNations for shared evenings in Paris” – adding another layer, once removed from the *actual* event organizing done by the meetup.com group, Expats Paris.

While Meetup.com and InterNations.org are characterized by Web 2.0 interactivity, which makes them flexible and dynamic, Kunveno and Horn’s Club are more traditional websites, where content is created by the owners and is much more static. This stasis is noticeable in the offline world as well: both sites are simply clearinghouses for publicizing other groups’ activities. Although in other cities InterNations may have established its own ‘local’ presence, in Paris the group is connected with the previously established Expats Paris

through the dual role of the local ambassadors as organizers of that group. International Events in Paris has multiple portals as well: in addition to its meetup.com webpage, the group has its own dedicated website, which is not very highly utilized, and a Facebook group, which is heavily utilized by longer-term members – a more ‘insider’ format than the meet-up page which is more focused on welcoming and being found by ‘newcomers’.

The fact that *numerous* websites claim to provide a portal to offline events creates a sense of many social outlets provided by a range of groups, when in fact, because the sites actually direct participants to a limited number of events, the offline scene is much smaller than is portrayed online. While this can be confusing, and limits the number of events to which a person actually has access, the streamlined nature of using various portals to drive people to fewer events contributes to the feeling that there *is* ‘an international community’ in Paris and helps keep that community from being overly fragmented.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have illustrated the context through which an ‘international community’ in Paris is a transnational social space constituted through both on- and offline discourses, practices, and a rotation of locales. To provide backdrop for this context, I portrayed some of the tensions Paris faces at a crossroads of the ‘local’ and the ‘global’ and how these contradicting forces play out in complex ways in terms of experiences of foreigners residing in the city, as well as the ways the city’s political and business leaders angle to position Paris and plan its future.

Various reports have placed Paris in the top or second tier of ‘global city’ or ‘world city’ hierarchies, and to the extent the city faces competition for this status in Europe, it is

from London, which is not technically part of ‘the Continent.’ On the other hand, even if playing second fiddle to London, Paris is Continental Europe’s gateway to that leading global city. According to *The Economist*: “The French and British capitals are linked as never before. Since the opening of Britain’s first high-speed rail link [in 2007]...only two-and-a-quarter hours separate the two” (March 15, 2008:1).

By placing Paris within the network of ‘global cities’ (both globally and as a European hub) my goal was to demonstrate how migratory paths, particularly those of globally migrating professionals, concentrate in Paris as part of the ‘centralization of service functions’ of transnational corporations explained by Sassen. These professionals, many of whom arrive alone in Paris, make up a large part of the international meet-up scene that I studied. Many arrive with dreams of discovering ‘Paris’ as a *local place* – and of ‘becoming local’ – and it is often upon finding themselves excluded from that place that they find the meet-ups and become involved with the ‘international community.’ Through participation in the spaces that make up that community, global networks are created (or added onto), but a local Paris is also accessed in communion with other ‘international people’.

The international community as a space is constituted both rhetorically and through the routine practices of attending face-to-face meet-ups. It is a morphic space with very loose boundaries – boundaries created not by impassable gates, high walls, or expensive membership cards, but through various types of experiential knowledge, language competencies and other types of ‘global’ cultural capital, which will be discussed further in Chapter Five. First, however, Chapter Four addresses issues of social class in the international community, introduces ethnographic narratives that contribute further empirical understanding of the range of class positions within the field of privileged migration, and

discusses media use by these migrants in relation to previous research that has been conducted in relation to migration and media.

Chapter Four

‘Transnational elites’ or a new ‘global middle class’? Towards a broadened understanding of privileged migrants and their media use

I was trying to convince Benjamin that he had the perfect profile for an interview with me. Alex was there too and he asked, “So what kind of people are you looking for?” I explained to them that I was confused because on the web profiles so many people said they had lived all around the world, but then I come to the parties and I don’t meet that many people who’d lived in a lot of countries – like it seemed France was just their first or second trip living abroad. So what’s up?

“They’re lying,” said Benjamin, with no hesitation.

“Why would they do that?” I asked.

“To get women,” he said.

But of course there must be another explanation, and women do it too....

- Field-notes, Oct. 8, 2008

Mobility has become the most powerful and most coveted stratifying factor.

- Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences*, 1998

If, as Bauman says, mobility is a key determinant of elite-ness, this would explain why highly mobile globally migrating professionals, and other people whose migration is voluntary, are simply called ‘the elites’ by so many scholars of globalization. Cast aside as elites and thus seen by activist-scholars as part of ‘the problem’, this group of people has been at the best caricaturized and at the worst, ignored, by empirical research relating to globalization. Moore (2005) points out that in anthropological studies, transnational business people have been featured mainly as “two-dimensional oppressors” (p. 2).

Until recently, literature on migration in the context of globalization had dealt primarily with three areas: first, the movement from the poorer global South to the richer nations of the North; second, the constitution and maintenance of Diasporic networks of migrants of a similar ethnic, religious or regional background who continue to identify and connect with a community from dispersed locations around the world; and third, transnational and/or hybrid identities developing as a result of migrants from either of the two previous groups seen both ‘bridging’ to old communities and ‘bonding’ with new ones²⁴. For the most part, empirical studies outside of ‘subaltern’ or Diasporic groups have focused on non-migration forms of mobility such as business travel and tourism²⁵. The very word, ‘migration’ has been used to connote movements of the poor, while the term ‘mobility’ has mainly referred to elites.

A nascent literature is just beginning to acknowledge other groups that make up the overall spectrum of global migration – people not driven by dire circumstances but rather by professional employment, lifestyle choices, educational opportunities, or other forms of mobility that are of *relative* privilege, but not necessary commanding elite status. Lamenting that migration and globalization studies are “more attuned to thinking about immigrants at the lower end of the labor market and then usually in terms of minority race, ethnicity or culture,” Smith and Favell (2006) assert the need to “open up opportunities for researchers seeking to resist the clichéd opposition of ‘elite’ and ‘ethnic’ migrants in a polarized global economy” (p. 25). That ‘cliché’ appears in Bauman’s (1998) work, where the freedom and

²⁴ Work in media studies has focused particularly on the role of media in these second two areas (e.g. Georgiou 2006; Bailey et al 2007; Karim 2006).

²⁵ For an interesting discussion of mobility and business travel, see Sharma, 2008; for an overview of work on tourist mobilities, see *The critical turn in tourism studies* by Ateljevic et al (2007).

ability to move voluntarily has been constructed as a dichotomy wherein a hyper mobile and exterritorial elite are increasingly distanced from a ghettoized, localized 'rest'.

Smith and Favell (2006) argue that the time has come for the idea of a group of "global elites" who are the "human hands, brains, and faces behind the impersonal dynamics of global markets and nation-state decline" (p. 2) to be scrutinized and investigated by scholars:

The lives and experiences of these frequent-flying, fast-lane, global elites are better known from the editorial and marketing content of glossy magazines or corporate brochures than they are from solid social science research... In fact, the skilled and educated among the globally mobile also include: students, nurses, mid-level technical and clerical employees, ambitious or adventurous upwardly mobile middle-classes, migrants from a range of intermediate developing states, and many more it would be hard to describe as "elites"... A whole range of types of international migrants, in fact, are not captured by the two stylized images counter-posed at either end of the social spectrum: high-flying corporate elites and desperate, poverty-stricken labor migrants and asylum-seekers.' (p. 2)

In this chapter, I aim to contribute to this effort to provide more detailed and varied descriptions about the lives of 'privileged migrants'. First, I summarize the argument that the term 'elite' has been used to cast too wide a net, one which does not allow for an understanding of the multiple positions along a spectrum of migration that is indeed 'privileged,' *relatively* speaking, yet characterized by much class variation. I review literature on elites in the context of globalization and mobility, and then introduce a round of recent

studies that broadens the continuum along which privileged migration is viewed – studies that illustrate a much more complex range of positions than can be encompassed by the monolithic term, ‘elite.’

I then move toward sharing ethnographic observations from my own study, and introduce some of my interview participants: with these brief introductions I hope to create a conglomerated effect that illustrates the multiplicity of positions that are found in the international community in Paris, including the varied social class backgrounds from which these ‘privileged’ migrants hail. In sharing the range of backgrounds from which participants ‘originate,’ as well as the circumstances that brought them to Paris and the meet-ups – and in relation to the quotes at the top of this chapter – I demonstrate that while mobility in and of itself is an important source of ‘cultural capital’, it should not be automatically equated with ‘elite,’ and particularly not economic elitism, in the way that Bauman and others have suggested. Finally, I discuss how these migrants can be situated in relation to previous work on migrants and media use.

This chapter is a prelude to conceptualizing a broad range of *performances, strategies and identifications* involved in the construction of a collective identity known as ‘the international people’ – processes of which will be discussed in the following chapter.

‘Class’ and Professional Migrants in Globalization Discourse

Scholars overwhelmingly agree that today’s forms of economic globalization originated through the projects of powerful figures in corporations and wealthy state governments, forged through a combination of formal and informal supranational mechanisms such as the IMF, World Bank, WTO, the Davos World Economic Forum, etc. (e.g. Robinson 2004;

Sassen 2007). Coterminous with these processes, Sassen points out that, “we are seeing the formation of an increasingly complex and flexible transnational labor market for high-level professionals in advanced corporate services that links a growing number of highly developed and developing countries” (2007:145). As scholars consider this emergent labor force, they have disagreed to what extent it represents the formation of an elite new ‘global class’.

Theories of a ‘Transnational Capitalist Class’

Moore (2005) finds that there is increasing support from “social scientists for the concept of a *transnational capitalist class*, in the form of an inward-focused, globally-engaged elite, which interacts with the local only as much as it serves its economic purposes” (p. 35). But, while many globalization theorists (e.g. Robinson 2004; Sklair 2001; Sassen 2007; Carroll & Carson 2003) agree that a transnational capitalist class is forming (or has formed), they represent a range of views regarding the parameters that constitute it. In almost all cases the formation of this class involves mobility and migration (Carroll & Carson is an exception, as they focus more on institutional links rather than travel/mobility).

Mechanisms through which a class of global elites forms and acts are illustrated by Robinson in his *A Theory of Global Capitalism* (2004), where he attempts to demonstrate the transnational networks, structures, logics and relationships that make up globalization. Robinson says that a transnational capitalist class (TCC) arises from increased global mobility of capital, necessitated by capital’s continued need for outward expansion. This class is distinguished from national or local capitalists through its involvement in globalized production and management of globalized circuits of accumulation, “which gives it, spatially

and politically, an objective class existence and identity in the global system above any local territories and polities” (p. 47). He does not claim that the TCC is a homogenous group and says rather that there are multiple factions with shifting allegiances and, often, contradictory relationships with local, national, and other transnational capitals. For example, in “Flexible Citizenship” (1999) Aihwa Ong’s discussion of Chinese entrepreneurs making mosaic use of state apparatuses (e.g. passports, student visas, residency), international and national bank loans, and familial and other personal relationships to build global networks provides a useful example for imagining a faction of the TCC.

Interesting in Robinson’s globalization framework is that this emergent TCC cannot work without the support of a Transnational State (TNS), which creates the conditions for expanding and maintaining TCC power. Robinson’s TNS is quite different from what we would typically imagine as a ‘State’ apparatus: it is decentralized and is not comprised by a set of unified institutions. He groups current nation-states – with their function thus changed from local to global capitalist accumulation – along with international regulatory bodies (e.g. WTO), lending bodies (e.g. IMF) and other non-state actors (such as NGOs, transnational corporations) to create the TNS as a new type of regime in globalization. Like the TCC, Robinson’s TNS is flexible, always changing, and not allied with one particular group. Rather, it is the ideology of neo-liberalism and commitment to expanding this agenda that provides the coherence of the TNS and the TCC. Robinson argues that this transnational configuration will be, or is, the new global ‘power’. Through this framework he provides a view on how power is wielded through structures within the connectivity called globalization. He is clear that the transnational capitalist class is made up of integrated, but

not homogenous, 'global elites' who dominate various points along the circuits of the current economy.

While Robinson illustrates the *structures* through which a new class of global elites build and exert power, other scholars focus on these elites themselves, and the lifestyles that a so-called globally connected world enables them to lead. Bauman (1998) portrays a class of 'exterritorial elites' who isolate themselves from 'others' while living 'cosmopolitan' lifestyles that include traveling first class or using private aircrafts, as they and their finances cross borders with ease. He includes businessmen, 'culture managers,' and academics in this class of people who are now constantly 'on the move.'

Castells (1996) also conjures a group of mobile elites who supercede "the historical specificity of each locale" (p. 447) as they move about the globe, engaging each other through spaces (such as airport lounges and international hotels) and practices (such as eating fusion foods and jogging) unified around their cosmopolitan aesthetic. His elites are not a 'class' per se but are a new type of people whose "identity is not linked to any specific society but to membership of the managerial circles of the informational economy across a global cultural spectrum" (p. 447). These 'techno-financial-managerial elites' are mobile professionals wielding power in a global information economy. In fact, here we see a move from describing 'elites' as those *in control* of companies (the entrepreneurial owners, executives, CEOs, etc) to an inclusion of managerial professionals in the top tier of the new global strata.

Mobile managerial professionals are also a key constituency in the multiple 'global classes' that Saskia Sassen (2007) sees emerging in the interconnected web of global cities (p. 165). In pointing out that the "existence and functioning...of globalization takes vast

numbers of professionals, managers, executives, and technical staff members” (p. 175), she acknowledges the *diversity of professional hierarchies* in her definition of this group. Yet Sassen is perplexing in terms of whether this is an ‘elite’ force: She refers to ‘transnational elites’ (p. 173) whom she claims are mainly driven by ‘profit-making’ (p. 176), yet also uses the more open term, ‘transnational professional class’ (p. 175). As does Castells, however, she portrays this group as necessitating and contributing to the development of a standardized global network made up of a “hyperspace” of “state-of-the-art office buildings, residential districts, airports, and hotels” (p. 176).

Interestingly, when Sassen points out the disparity in ‘mobility rights’ between transnational professionals and low-skilled migrants that are codified in supranational agreements, she overlooks the challenges to the agency of these professionals that her own point illuminates:

Insufficiently noted is the fact that all the major free trade agreements also provide such rights of access to professionals. The World Trade Organization (WTO) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), among others, give transnational professionals mobility rights. These rights constitute a new legal “infrastructure.” Professionals in each of the specific sectors, which include finance, business services, and telecommunications, can reside in any signatory country for at least three years and enjoy various rights and protections... The mobility rights [that] free-trade agreements grant professionals are buried under such headings as “the internationalization of trade and investment in business services.” This language obscures the fact that these are mobility rights given to what are ultimately migrant workers. (Sassen 2007: 179)

New types of visas ‘taken care of’ as part of corporate employment contracts, created to facilitate professionals’ entry into a national territory, are indeed a divergence from the more hard-won, personally financed, and/or covert entry and residence of less privileged migrants. However, that these visas are time-limited puts migrating professionals into a predicament in which to choose to settle more permanently in a country where they’ve been posted is a much more difficult task than the ease of their temporary residency might suggest. In this way, the *continuous mobility* of transnational professionals is, while not forced, at least coerced, and the agency attributed to these workers is perhaps overstated. In certain ways, transnational migrating professionals may become trapped in mobility – a condition that is certainly not congruous with their portrayal as the global powerful. This idea is noted in the following excerpt from an interview with Phoebe, where she relates a friends’ predicament with her labor contract:

P Most people are on a three-year contract. So they’re here for three years, and then some obviously hope to renew it...

E Is the three-year thing a bureaucratic thing, like related to the paperwork?

P It just seems... well, I don’t know, for me obviously it’s different because I work as a nanny so I have no fixed contract, no three-years point blank. But a lot of the contracts seem to be – all the expat contracts, whoever they’re working for – GE or General Motors or Reynolds or BMG Paris - it all seems to be three year contracts. So I mean those people obviously are here [at the meet-ups] needing to make friends.

E Yeah, three years is a long time.

P It is a long time, it is. But then again it goes quite fast. I've been here a year and it's gone quite fast. My friend... She panicked basically because after a year she really wanted to stay and she wasn't sure if they were going to renew her contract.

Indeed, Smith and Favell (2006) point out that 'real' elites "tend to have routine access to international travel and experience through family connections and schooling – as well as a far better chance of success in their chosen career at home – without needing to propel themselves *individually* onto an international stage" (p. 9, emphasis added). They propose that the so-called 'elites' who make up the migrating professional workforce are in fact ambitious, college-educated people from the middle-classes of industrialized countries who see the chance to work internationally as a gateway to opportunities they would *not* have at home. On the other hand, they say that the professionals coming from less-developed countries *are* more likely to be from relatively elite backgrounds, as it is only the relatively elite people in poorer countries who have access to the education and networks necessary to access international professional opportunities from the 'periphery'. Yet again, the authors see mobile careers in *both* of these cases as being undertaken to access opportunities that would not be found at home, suggesting that while mobility is indeed a form of privileged capital, when it is coupled with migration it becomes more of a tool for improving one's lot in life rather than the realm of an *established global elite*.

Weiss (2005), too, points out that the elite status of "transnational upper classes" does not mean that these people "are constantly on the move. On the contrary, the ability to remain in a suitable place can be seen as a privilege" (p. 714). In one of the early 'transnational capitalist class' frameworks, sociologist Leslie Sklair (2000) originally imagined a varied

group that included non-*executive* professionals – such as journalists and state bureaucrats. The constituents of his TCC – more broadly defined than in Robinson’s later work – were those whose *worldviews* were oriented towards global capitalism: “people who see their interests...and/or the interests of their countries of citizenship, as best served by identification with the interests of the capitalist global system, in particular the interests of the transnational corporations” (p. 8 in Moore 2005: 33). Sklair (2001) separated the TCC into four ‘fractions’: executives of multinational corporations and their local affiliates, globalizing state bureaucrats, globalizing professionals, and what he called ‘consumerist elites’ – later changed to ‘merchants and media’ (p. 17). Moore (2005) expanded on this to suggest that what we are witnessing is *not* the formation of a transnational *class*, but rather a diverse transnational *society*, which she describes as:

A globe-wide social unit which comprises all forms of transnational capitalism, from tourism to migrant labor to transnational business, and the business-focused aspects of other types of transnational activity, such as Internet use and refugee networks. It also includes the links between different transnational capitalist social formations. (p. 164)

Interestingly, while Moore’s *transnational society* allows for class diversity in global mobility, she continues to refer to the transnational business people within that society as ‘elites,’ as did Sklair. And while Moore critiques models of the transnational capitalist class for classifying “the likes of Rupert Murdoch in the same category as a German-speaking junior manager who visits Frankfurt once a month, or a maintenance man who does not deal with international finance, but has been around the world several times during his holidays” (2005: 161), her disapproval stems not from the fact the TCC would consider all of these

people as ‘elites’ due to their mobility, but that it would assume them all to have a similar mindset, oriented toward ‘the global’.

Moore’s is a valuable critique of the assumed worldviews of mobile people (an issue which will be discussed in the following chapter) yet she maintains the belief that people with voluntary mobilities may be lumped together as elites. At the same time, she admits that the businesspeople from her study “did not seem to have much in the way of control over their own daily work activities, let alone the global market” (p. 161), and realizes that “Sklair’s [TCC] thus appears to attribute too much agency to the German transnational businesspeople” who made up the focus of her study (Moore 2005: 162).

‘Middling’ Transnationalism

Is a ‘transnational *middle* class’ instead forming around the connections made through professional international travel and participation in communities of other migrating professionals? In Kennedy’s (2004) study of design professionals who had worked in at least one other country and on multi-national teams, research participants were seen to transcend nationality and cultural differences to form friendships, mostly because of other things in common such as education, age-range, relationship status (single and unattached), a similar professional ethos, and ‘chief among these...*a middle class social status and background*’ (p. 98, emphasis added). He claimed that,

In short, at least in terms of shared cultural capital, globalization is indeed helping to create a transnational middle class... When living abroad such professionals may not be especially drawn towards the “locals.” Rather they are searching out individuals

from the host and other countries who are very similar to themselves and drawing upon a shared bank of transnational middle class orientations. (p. 98)

And Hardt and Negri (2000) suggest that these transnational ‘immaterial laborers’ – those professionals who work in service areas such as advertising, accounting, design, etc – may form a new global proletariat with the potential for social action on a worldwide scale.

Weiss (2005) interviewed ‘highly skilled migrants’ who had crossed national borders at least one time, and found that “the fact that the interviewees share many similarities despite coming either from the centre or the (semi-)periphery supports the assumption that their social position is structurally independent from the nation-state” (717-718). She does not conclude that a transnational middle class is formed by the fact that many of these migrants are able to cross national borders with “little depreciation of their cultural capital” (716), but does believe that new class-related questions should focus on groups who are situated trans- or non-nationally beyond any nation-state.

A current strand in the research makes a distinction between pointing to the middle class *positions* of many mobile or migrating people and the idea that an actual *transnational middle class* is emerging²⁶. For example, in her ethnographic study of North American and European expatriates in Indonesia, Anne Mieke Fechter (2007), who found her participants to be far from elite, claimed that the idea of a unified class – even if a middle class – ‘contrasts with ample evidence of the internal differentiation of expatriates in terms of class’ (p. 164).

²⁶ And yet another faction talks of a ‘new global middle class’ in different way: Major news outlets such as NPR, The Economist, and The Financial Times, as well as globally focused organizations and institutes now frequently discuss an emerging global middle class to refer to *growing markets of middle class consumers in individual developing countries* (e.g. Beattie 2006; World Policy Institute 2009; *The Economist* 14-Feb-09; *Knowledge@Wharton* 09-July-08; NPR 28-Mar-09; Leonard 2008; Pew Global Attitudes 2009). Thus, rather than suggesting the formation of a global class, these organizations celebrate the ‘coming up’ of consumer markets in non-Western countries that had previously been out of bounds for Western products.

And, while Smith and Favell believe that many “forms of migration and work in a mobile global context... would be better seen as ‘middling’ in class terms” (2006:8), they do not propose an emerging global middle class social formation.

In the introduction to an edited volume about privileged mobilities of many different kinds, Amit (2007) writes that “not only do the travelers described in this book not... occupy [elite] socioeconomic positions, but also their more modestly prosperous situations likely reflect a much broader reorientation of global long-distance travel and movement around middle-class rather than either very affluent or very poor voyagers” (p. 2-3). He points out that a number of university international exchanges now include work-study programs or internships that can lead to full-time employment offers later, and that “an increasingly important segment of ‘guest’ workers, a status once identified with relatively disadvantaged migrants, is... now ironically comprised of middle-class Western youths who can at one and the same time be wooed as tourists and serve as cheap, compliant, and temporary labor” (Amit 2007: 5).

The authors in Amit’s edited volume, as well as Smith and Favell in their book, demonstrate that migration, travel, and tourism are mobilities that now slide into each other, blurring the boundaries of previous categorizations (a trend shown even through the new types of combined visas offered by destination countries). This blurring was greatly apparent in the Paris International Community, as ‘members’ had drawn on multiple forms of tourism, international education, career opportunities, romantic attachments, and other situations to construct their mobile lives.

‘Class’ and the International Community: Stories from Paris

A variety of competencies are deployed to *bridge gaps* in commonality as participants at multiple Paris meet-ups collectively construct an international community to which they all belong. These strategies of *connecting* will be discussed in the following chapter, which deals with the ways that individuals and the group used websites and face-to-face meetings to create identifications around the ideal of an ‘international person’ and in creating an ‘international community.’ Here, however, I specifically want to portray some of the *differences* noted among members of that community, particularly in terms of social class backgrounds.

To do this, I supplement the literature discussed above with empirical examples in two ways: first, by relating specific situations where I noticed ‘class²⁷’ or other stratifying and status-based positions to be an issue at face-to-face events, and especially those situations that support the idea that attendees are not necessarily ‘elites’ (although many members attempt to portray the community as an elite one and/or are invested in demonstrating elite sensibilities); and second, by introducing five people in detail and others more briefly who I came to know through interviews and attendance at events in order to illustrate the diversity in social, cultural, and ideological backgrounds, as well as reasons/methods for migration and motivation to join ‘the meet-ups’.

²⁷ The category of ‘class’ is a slippery one, used in many different ways by academic theorists and in public discourse. I use the word in the more Weberian sense to connote social ‘status,’ rather than in the Marxist sense to connote an official position within the circuit of economic production. While I agree with Beck that the actual container of ‘class’ may not necessarily exist anymore, the term is useful to refer to peoples’ social positioning in terms of status and other forms of social hierarchies within a field.

Social Class and the International Meet-ups

Fechter argues that class in expatriate communities is not a unified or homogenous realm – something that my experience in attending the Paris meet-ups bears out as well. On the other hand, the discourse of some of the meet-up websites and by attendees worked to create the *sense* that the international people made up a type of elite. However, many members contested the extent to which the international community created through the meet-ups should be constructed as an elite group or simply as an opportunity for lonely expatriates to meet each other. As Phoebe pointed out to me about one meet-up group in particular:

That has a reputation – people have said they feel quite intimidated. It's like *click-y...* people are very dressed up... I mean the organizers are very friendly – I don't have anything against the organizers, and I've been to three or four, but of all expat-like meet-up things going on, they're the ones that I really haven't enjoyed myself, and all the girls I've taken or the guys have said the same thing. That out of all these meet-ups, that's the one... We've been to three or four – we kept trying though. And a friend of mine as well, she was like, "I am just not enjoying these."

While many members were put off by the elitist pretensions of some meet-up attendees, there was still a certain expectation about the quality of the venue, the food and the people at events. For example, while above Phoebe is quoted complaining about the posh character of one of the meet-ups, here she is criticizing another event for lacking a certain standard:

The first boat [party] was a disaster and that wasn't really their fault – it was one of those things where they'd booked the boat and a couple other parties had as well. It was the first hot day of the summer, which nobody was expecting, and stupidly – not

our organizers but the organizers of the boat – one that you can use the top deck... Well the top deck had been apparently reserved for Expats International, but what happened is that *everybody* was on the top deck and nobody could get served, nobody could get any food... you could just stand...

You know what, I think we did the Concorde Atlantic [boat] as well but we only lasted about twenty minutes because it was *dire*... ha! We walked in...It was *awful*! ...So we got two drinks and then we were just like, this is a Saturday night, this is the summer – we're going in to Saint Germain du Pres.

Hosting meet-ups at café-bars proved important in allowing for the class diversity of meet-up attendees – in this way, members could buy their own drinks at a rate they could afford. For example, one man with a high-paying job learned this the hard way; he decided to start his own international meet-up and learned that his financial position was not the average in the meet-up community. In this excerpt from an interview with Alice, she explains what happened:

A This organizer – he is actually very nice, this Italian. You know, tall guy, finance guy? He's very nice.

E I don't think I've met him.

A Yeah, and so he does like a once-a-month bar thing.

E What's the name of his meet-up?

A Hmmmm.... I don't know if it's 'Nightlife'... or...? He works in finance and he has a very nice salary. So he said that when he started his meet-ups, he would also suggest nice restaurants – like forty euros, fifty euros a person... and he said nobody showed up!

E Nobody showed up!!

A Not all of us work in finance, you know?

E Yeah...

A But he's not arrogant. He's very down to earth.

E He just didn't realize that what for him was normal, *wasn't*.

A Yeah!

E For others is a sacrifice.

A Ha!! So then he decided, I'm gonna change because otherwise it's not gonna work. So now he just chooses a bar.

While a majority of people at the meet-ups seemed to come from non-elite backgrounds, different cultural competencies and comforts connoted various types of class-*like* status. For example, the European attendees appeared more comfortable in some of the more elegant bars on the meet-up circuit, or in their business suits – resulting from the nature of European white-collar middle class cultures as well as their ‘home court advantage’. For example, the following excerpt is from Field-notes written after the second *Apero* I attended with International Events. Here I note that Aiden, from Singapore, who had seemed so at ease at the first *Apero* where I met him, seemed quite uncomfortable in the surroundings of this next meet-up. I too, was caught off guard by the elegance of the second locale; in terms of my attire, I had been prepared for something more like the casual atmosphere of the first event. The first *Apero* had been in a café-bar with many windows connecting its interior to the outside-street life and thus creating a non-exclusive feel. I'd worn blue jeans, and seemed to fit in thus. The scene did not feel pretentious or elite – not so for the second event, even though hosted by the same organization and attended by many of the same people:

The Apero started at 8pm at a bar called Alcazar in the fancy/cool St Germain area (metro Odeon) but I got there at 9pm because I was running late and then got lost because it was one of those places with barely a sign on the outside. Finally arriving, I walked into a dark-ish, sleek, hypermodern restaurant via a long walkway with a glowing floor and walls (I felt as if I were about to enter some kind of elegant fish tank/world). As I started to go upstairs to the area reserved for the party, a guy inside the door asked if he could take my coat. As I gave it to him, I was ashamed to see him see the inside lining, which was torn and tattered. Oops! I'd meant to throw it away a million times but on the outside it was a perfectly beautiful jacket. Anyway, I smiled at him, took my claim ticket, and went upstairs.

It was a mezzanine bar overlooking the elegant restaurant and was packed with people, mostly wearing suits, coming straight from work. How thankful I was to immediately see Aiden and Claire upon entering! They were standing near the entrance talking to each other – and perhaps waiting for me. I said hello, did the kisses, and Aiden sheepishly commented on what a swanky place it was. Not sure the words he used... maybe 'classy'. Think so. Anyway, he looked a little nervous about it, so I made a little joke about being out of my element too, saying "we don't have places like this in Wyoming" and then asked if he was going to get a drink with me. "No, I already had one" he said, and warned me about the prices. (Field-notes, September 23, 2008).

In the future, I saw Aiden at many other events, but never again when the *Apero* was held at Alcazar.

Some people that I spoke with felt their middle-class selves were a minority in a field where others were elites. Others, who had attended the meet-ups for a long time, were able to see through this – as well as the performances made by some attendees to mark themselves as members of a perceived elite – and even laugh at it; others learned over time at which events they would feel more comfortable and attended only those; and still others created their own criteria for differentiating and creating hierarchies, outside of class structures. For example, Aiden created a hierarchy around the definition of ‘international people,’ saying that the Western European and North American attendees were not really automatically ‘international’ and therefore could be slightly looked down upon:

A At this point in time, unless someone’s from...unless they’re from uh... I met a girl from Kosovo that day – THAT is impressive. But uh, more often than not, you’re gonna meet British, American, Australian, German, Spanish, Italian...and surrounding countries

E Mostly European, North American...

A Yeah, so it’s not impressive anyway.

E Are there other Asians around?

A Yeah, there are a lot of Asians around, but same thing, they’re either from Japan or China, Korea... I mean, how many countries... I mean, unless someone’s from a really exotic country...Iceland, Kosovo, Georgia – meaning the country – I would be impressed. Otherwise it’s pretty arbitrary... You tell me you’re from California and I’m like ‘yeah great’... so it doesn’t really matter....

E I've noticed on these websites some people call themselves 'expatriates', some say 'global nomads', some say 'international people' ... what do you call yourself?

A I don't have a name for myself. I'm pretty proud, bordering on arrogant, that I consider myself "tri-continental", which, I think a lot of people cannot say, because either they only stay in Europe, or just Europe and the States.

E So what they say is "international" really is just...

A It's no, it's *not*. So, if someone has actually spent a *significant* amount of time in Africa or in South America, I would respect that. But just because they've been all around the what, fifteen common European countries and the States, no, sorry, that's not *international*.

E So, what do they mean when they say "we're international people"?

A What do they mean? Basically what I think they mean when they say they're international people is that they've been to more than one country...that another country other than this current one. To me that's it, but that's not the way, not the way I would define "international" because I think if you're gonna consider yourself international you're gonna have to *cross* cultures. And the European and the American cultures...there are differences but at the end of the day it'll still be "Western"... You can encompass that under the entire Western cultures. So it's still just one place, the way I see it. So, [if they] can break into the Asian, the African or the South American, and they have been there for a significant amount of time – I consider that international.

Aiden's comments reflect the tensions, long noted in postcolonial research, of 'non-Western' or citizens of formerly colonized countries moving in 'Western society.' In terms of a hierarchy of a status based on 'internationality,' this is not a construct unique to Aiden, but was noted on several occasions and will be further discussed in the following chapter. For example, Brandon's story illustrates how such a hierarchy is experienced on the other side of the coin, by a 'local.' Brandon is a young Parisian man from a relatively privileged background. He considers himself to be an 'international person' because he has lived abroad in both Stockholm, Sweden and New York City, and is tri-lingual. When he returned from living in New York, he joined meetup.com because he wanted to keep up his international lifestyle; but he was nervous to attend the face-to-face events because he feared that as a French person, he would not be welcomed as an 'international':

B When I came back here I just felt like I was missing all the international atmosphere so I thought well, maybe I should try to do something to meet up with all the internationals here. And I just signed up for it.

E Have you been to any of the international parties yet?

B No, not yet. I just signed up... I think it was in August.

E I've been going to them for my research and they're very fun.

B But the thing is I'm not sure if I can really fit in that group anymore because I'm a *French* guy.

E A lot of French people go.

B There is a lot of French?!

E Yeah! Do you feel like people will say 'Why are you here?'

B Yeah, like ‘You’re not international.’ Like yeah, that’s true. But I can go there and just fake that I’m Swedish.

If ‘international people’ are some sort of new formation in globalization, ‘class’ may prove to be the wrong way of imagining them. The multiple directions from which people are arriving and departing the international community indicate that ‘middling transnationalism’ is much more about *individuality* than collectivity, and the collective belonging perhaps becomes a means to an end for each separate participant. As globalization theorist Ulrich Beck (interviewed by Jonathan Rutherford 1999, in Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) has noted, rather than continuing to think in terms of class, attention might be better shifted to the ways that the new institutional structures of life encourage increased individualization as a mode of belonging in the world.

For example, the participants in the Paris international meet-ups come from many different backgrounds, and that their discourse is invested in implying *commonality* demonstrates a gap between the increasing ‘individualization of life’ noted by Beck and traditional categories for thinking about belonging and attachment – such as ‘class,’ nationality, etc. Before delving – in the following chapter – into the methods through which this commonality (or collectivity) is constructed, I will first empirically illustrate this variety of different individual backgrounds, motivations, and experiences, by sharing brief narratives written about some of the people I interviewed in Paris.

Aiden, from Singapore

I will begin with Aiden, as he was my first interview contact in Paris and therein set the standard for subsequent discussions with new participants. Aiden did his undergraduate

degree in engineering in the US, at the University of Michigan, graduating in 2001. After two years of mandatory military service back in Singapore, he then went to Switzerland to study for a master's degree; during which time he did an internship in Paris with a French company that later hired him. When I spoke with him, he was not very satisfied with his job but said his goal was to work towards the French 'greencard'. After obtaining it, he would be open to moving somewhere else in the world, saying about his engineering degree: "I'm glad I'm flexible."

When I met Aiden at the first meet-up, he'd been working in Paris for a year, and living at an international youth hostel outside of the city, past the Orly airport. He lived in the hostel because he found the constant – even if rotating – company of other borders to be more comforting than living alone, and it was a good price, allowed him his own room, and included free wifi. Because the hostel was outside of the city, Aiden would often come into Paris for the entire day – to attend meet-ups, go to dinner with fellow hostelers or other friends, or hang out in his favorite bar, the Highlander – a dark, dirty, hidden Irish pub on the Left Bank, just a block or two from the River Seine. He told me he was a regular at the pub, and indeed, the bartender and other Sunday clients seemed to know him during our interview there. He wasn't a big drinker – I think he nursed a Coke during our talk – but he frequented the bar because its large, flat screen televisions provided a constant source of live soccer and Formula One broadcasts and provided a home-base when he came into the city. When I asked him about when and why he began using the meet-ups to meet people, he explained:

I guess it's natural for any expatriate that when they come to a new city – they are bored, lonely, nothing to do... so usually you either find groups for people to talk to, or find a girlfriend or boyfriend, I think that's very common. So, I think I started

about three months after I arrived in November – about January or February I started looking around for these events.

Although Aiden constantly met people in the hostel, he found those people to be very ‘temporary’ and perhaps too young for him to relate to, most being in their early twenties or even late-teens, whereas the expatriates at meet-up events tended to be ‘older’ (he was almost thirty). When I asked him about the Singaporean community in Paris, he mentioned that of around 300 local Singaporeans, about 50% of them are married to French people and are “a little bit older crowd, with kids.” The others are mostly people younger than him who have come to France for their studies. He has found a small group of Singaporeans within his age/experience group with whom he organizes a dinner in a restaurant once every one or two weeks, which is a nice break for all of them: “A lot of us work in French companies, deal with French, deal with international people every single day. And it’s nice to break free of that just for one dinner a week. Or one dinner in two weeks.” What do they talk about? I asked. “We share experiences just like with the international group. It’s just that we do it in our *own language*.”

Mainly though, Aiden considers himself an international, or a ‘tri-continental’ person, even drawing on strategies such as daily browsing of Google News in order to know the headlines from around the world, so that, in his words, “When I ask someone where they’re from, I think it’s nice when it seems like I know what’s happening in their country, you know, and it makes me a good conversation... I wanna be on my toes with what’s going on in the world.”

He’s found the meet-ups helpful for meeting people, but points out that,

The turnover is really high... I mean they're only here for like two months, and then they go and you don't see them ever again. The nature of Paris is like that for a lot of expatriates. When I meet an expatriate that's been here for more than one year, I'm like Whoa... that's rare, that's very, very rare. So the nature of such events is that you're probably not going to meet a person regularly.... It's kind of sad. But I mean, I guess that's the way *I've* been – going around so many countries.

Just before my fieldwork ended, in December 2008, I received an email from Aiden saying that he had found a new job in the South of France, and would be moving soon.

Marie, from Luxembourg

I met her Marie at an International Events meet-up on a riverboat. She was living in Paris for three and a half months for her job as an international correspondent creating 'country reports' for two English-language publications, one based in China and one in Japan. In her job, she and a team of two or three other female correspondents spend three and a half months working in each country-site, during which time they interview a range of people from business leaders and CEOs in various industries to government representatives, as well as sell advertising that will appear in a final report/publication. Once they have finished a project in one country, each woman is sent to a new country for a new project with an entirely new team of female colleagues, again for three and a half months.

So far, Marie has been posted in Germany, Italy, Finland, Singapore, Thailand, Dubai, and France. In Paris, she feels she can integrate more with the local scene because French is her first language. Before taking this position, her only other experience living abroad was a university exchange in Australia, which is where she became fluent in English.

By moving a lot, she feels she's building a global network of friends, which she manages via Facebook:

You move around a lot, you meet many people... and many people you meet, they *also* move a lot... and it's really good to build a network, somehow like a global network, where you really have friends all over the world... Facebook is definitely helpful I think, first of all to stay in touch with these people – easier than email. Uh, but also just yeah, Facebook it's like “I'm going *there*, do you know *anyone*?”

The mobility and lifestyle of the job, she said, make her feel like a ‘rock star’:

Sometimes we feel like rock stars! Because like you really work hard during the week, and on the weekends, depending on which country you are, depending on which group of people you are, we can play hard. So really you go out until 6 o'clock in the morning, you are in the VIP lounge and guys are bringing you champagne, so it's really the rock star life. And then when you have an easy schedule, you go and you do what you want. You go to the gym, you go shopping, you do what you want. As long as the money comes in... and, or really you can call it that you are really “jet set” just because one day you live in *that* city and the other day in *that* city.

At the same time Marie feels the constant mobility is taking its toll. Recently she decided to quit her job, but in order to keep her, the boss offered to let her choose her next assignment location, and she chose to head back to Paris for the next three and a half months. Originally, though, this job was ‘exactly’ what she wanted:

I wanted to move around. And I applied at that time to five different jobs and I really wanted to get this job. Because it's great – you get to travel a lot, you get to interview business leaders of all the important economies... So I thought, the job is interesting

and you get to move, so you really have in one job, one position, you get to experience varied countries. So for example, in Singapore or Dubai – those are really now the booming economies. So where, in which other jobs would I have the same opportunity? And interviewing these people that make the decisions in those countries.

One of the main differences in this position is that she has less ‘rights’ than she would have as an employee in Luxembourg. She explains how this was scary at first but something she overlooked in order to have a ‘global opportunity’:

It was like, oh this is weird, how can you trust them? They sent me the contract; the contract was not like – I mean, I’m coming from Luxembourg, so there you have SO many rights, the law is very strict and so as an employee you have excellent rights. With this company, it’s more... they have their *own contract*. It’s like you take it or you leave it.

In the future Marie can imagine remaining an expatriate but would like to be somewhere more ‘long-term’ – like for two or three *years*, rather than months, at a time. Meanwhile, her computer is her ‘home-base’:

I sleep with my computer, like I have it in my bed and I chat with people and then I put it on the side. It’s really my best friend. I travel with my laptop – it’s really my buddy that I have always, because it’s that connection that uh... pull it out to connect with friends and family all over.

Anna, from Bulgaria

Anna is twenty-four years old, and was one of Marie's colleagues on the 'country report' they were producing about France. This was her first post as an international correspondent. Her mother is Russian, and as a child Anna often spent summers with her grandparents in Latvia, returning each fall to Bulgaria speaking Russian and finding herself treated as a foreigner by her classmates. No one in her family had traveled much other than those trips, but she felt deeply that she would like to travel, and spent five dedicated years studying to get a scholarship to go to a university in the US. When she was eighteen years old, she received a scholarship to study at Washington and Lee University in Virginia, where she took advantage of three separate study abroad opportunities, in Spain, London, and Hong Kong, and through those experiences 'became addicted' to traveling.

After obtaining her bachelor's degree, Anna moved to New York City and worked as an executive's assistant in a fashion company. She then moved to Shanghai, China, where she took language lessons, and later to Hong Kong for a job as a sales person in a French company. After two years in China, she came to France to begin what she described as her 'perfect job':

I got this job because when I was in Shenzhen for one year I really had the feeling from inside that I had to get away, that it's time to move on. And then I thought well why should I quit every job to move because you know, it's tough to find a new job every so often, so I was like let's look for a job that will require for me to travel.

While it may be her dream job, she is aware that it could seem like a strange arrangement to her parents, and thus had elected not to tell them about it until she could see them face-to-face during her Christmastime break – one of two pre-determined holiday periods she is

allowed with the job. I pointed out that it made sense her parents may worry, especially because she would not yet even be able to tell them where she was moving next. She agreed, but saw that as a positive aspect:

It's such a challenge you know, they send you somewhere – you don't know where – and you have to do something and you have to end up really quickly *ready* for work...I like it. I like – it's adventurous, and the surprise.

Anna hasn't been very interested in the international meet-ups except as an observer, but at the time of our interview was also looking for a 'photography'-themed meet-up in which to become more active. At the time of this writing in Spring 2009, she is already living and working in a new country and perhaps attending a whole new set of meet-ups there.

Alice, from South America & the United States

Alice is a doctoral student, originally from a South American country, whose family migrated to the United States when she was young. She attended U.S. universities for both her bachelor's and master's degrees, but then due to technical problems with her 'Greencard' was forced to move back to her native country, where she then worked for four years.

Unhappy there, and unable to return to the country that she really considered 'home', Alice applied to a doctoral program in Toulouse, France. While studying, she pays her bills by teaching the English language to businesspeople in Paris – where she moved because it's easier to find clients than in Toulouse²⁸. She did not know anybody when she arrived in the city, and did not find herself welcomed with by the locals, an experience she was already familiar with from being an immigrant in the US:

²⁸ Through a recent law, the French government allows international students to work legally up to three days a week.

I have experienced a lot of insult in the US and in France, in all kinds of issues related to nationality. And so I think this is, it can be related to other variables that people tie on to you. Like for example, here in France, a woman who's over thirty-five, who's not married, has no kids, comes alone to study, is something – and doesn't have a lot of money – you get insulted with, I mean, things that are *very ugly*.

Alice has thus found the meet-ups to be crucial for keeping busy and meeting people, although it has not always been a positive experience. Sometimes she attends meet-up events up to five days a week, just for the companionship. She has gone to the various international parties, the American meet-up, as well as the British and the Australian meet-ups, a walking group, a museum group – she even attended the German meet-up although she does not speak any German. She tried starting her own meet-up group – a few times – efforts that unfortunately failed. The first failed because she wanted to charge each attendee nine euros for group English lessons, but quickly learned that people expect event attendance to be free. On the second try, Alice, who declares herself 'very conservative' was concerned that one of the attendees – a woman – was flirting with her. This is how she dealt with it:

A She gave me a really sleazy look... and I said, you're not coming again! You know, I didn't *tell* her, but I said I don't want you in *this* group... so then, what I tried to do... Ha!

E Oh no...

A I wouldn't put the address of where we were going to meet, you know?! And I said, "I'm just going to – at the last minute – send out emails to the people who

are interested”... And that didn’t work! Nobody would be sitting at their computer checking their email! And nobody knew where the meet-up was and I would get these emails... “Where is the meet-up?” It’s like – a few people asked, and I said, this is not gonna work. And then I... I actually contacted the customer service and I said, “Is there a way to block, or to expel?”

There wasn’t – at the time – although since then the company has provided more options for ‘filtering’ out unwanted attendees.

Alice’s conservatism is actually one of the most difficult barriers that she faces in trying to make friends at the international meet-ups. While she feels she has dealt with much sexual innuendo in response to assumptions based on her nationality, the most isolating factor for her is that ‘liberalism’ seems to be the taken for granted point-of-view at events. In terms of ‘hierarchy’, she finds that values and attitudes are the much more divisive in the groups than race or nationality. For example, she told me, “I find the minute that you say you would *not* have voted for Obama, then it’s like... oh my God, she’s a monster, you know? And she must be a *horrible* person.”

Sometimes her conservatism makes her the object of jokes and teasing, a mode of affect quite commonly used to bridge cultural gaps in the international events, but one not comfortable for everyone. For example, she related to me this story where a group was supposedly joking but she felt they were making fun of her:

A And so, there she was in this little group. And they were bonding, you know? The four liberals were there bonding away. And so I started to get kind of annoyed. And then, so, the Iranian guy and the surgeon guy, they started to make fun of me. You know? Like, “we don’t like you so we’re gonna make fun of you”.

E And you could hear them?

A Yeah, cause it was, you know when people are like, you know, “Oh, we’re just making jokes!” And, so in this bar – I mean, it wasn’t a sleazy bar but you know how a lot of liberal things are normalizing things, which I think are very problematic? So they had a ‘strip-tease’ pole near the window, like, facing out. And obviously it’s just for fun – I’m sure they don’t have real strip-teasers there. And so, the surgeon guy and the woman started to make jokes about, you know, *the pole* and then she was like, “Why don’t you go there and do us a little number?” and stuff like that.

Alice also feels she has faced a ‘class’ snobbery that has made her uncomfortable at times, such as when a woman at a meet-up luncheon made her feel bad for suggesting to another attendee that they share an entrée; or when a man at an international *apero* pushed her to compare what they were each paying for their apartments:

He doesn’t want to know about character, you know, it’s *money*. And there are a lot of money-obsessed people and like this stupid petit-bourgeois stuff in these meet-ups, and so that was one thing. And then I think he also started to get this, “Oh my goodness, she’s a woman, she’s single here and she’s not well-off, so she must be *after* something from *me* and other men.”

In fact, Alice points out it is difficult to be a single woman looking for a relationship without being considered somehow ‘desperate’ by the international crowd (an assumed desperation that she feels is very connected to money):

For me the issue is, given that I would have liked to find a second husband a long time ago, but I have not been successful. And so for me that is a *priority*. And I have

been alone for several years. I need to add that because, in liberal culture, you know, if you say that you would like to get married, a lot of the time people immediately think, “Well you must be desperate. And you’re gonna get married next week,” you know? That’s not the case. But, it is a priority. So, for me, it’s like, *if* I meet someone, I don’t care if they are from Antarctica, you know? Siberia!! Sahara!! *That’s* my priority – it’s my personal life.

So, second to that, given that my chances don’t seem all that wonderful at this point, then I have my own personal financial security... because I am not ‘comfortable.’ And because with all these moving experiences, I have paid taxes that I will never see the benefit of, including retirement – a lot of retirement money. And so, what I’m trying to figure out is a strategy where I will not be poor and alone and in difficult situations down the road.

While Alice must continually worry about her financial situation, she considers herself a cultured and educated person, although she would never call herself ‘elite.’ Still, in our interview, she often referred to certain ‘trashy’ or ‘nasty’ people at some of the meet-ups. Or here, for example, she draws on such terms to discuss how two-way Internet communication changed once it was no longer the domain of graduate students and university professors:

When all the Internet and the messaging and all these meeting sites – not the Facebook because that’s recent, but the, the *meeting* sites – things exploded. Then what I noticed is – all the trash of people came online. Because before it was very selected and privileged because it was *the* grad students and the international universities, you know? After that, I had really bad experiences just like, meeting

really stupid people. Or you know, the conversations I found horrible. And you start to get all the sexual trash and all that crap. You know? So that happened and then because of these secondary bad experiences, I just decided that the Internet was not a good tool for making friends and meeting people, you know? It was best to try the traditional way of doing activities and just trying to meet people.

Cultural capital rather than financial capital is an important distinction of class in the international community. This will be discussed further in the following chapter. As for Alice, eventually, finding herself alone in Paris, she changed her mind about the Internet as a social networking tool – driven by a combination of loneliness and a need for information, or some sort of network where people could show her the ropes of getting along in this foreign country. But she's finding it difficult to fit in, seeing herself as very different than what she considers to be the 'typical' participant:

It's very hard because I feel right now that I don't have a country and I don't have a culture, because even in the United States, I don't... I'm not 'American'... And I'm not [really identified with my country] and I'm not French. And I'm this very, you know, *individual mix*. And I'm not the best diplomat either...the best person in, you know, just socializing. I'm okay but not that good. And so I feel that I can't talk to people because I have a whole different way of seeing things and it's like, they don't understand – they don't grasp it. And if you're critical of something, then they get defensive, you know, "She does not think like us." So, who wants to talk?

I've seen people who are so skilled. And they're very gentle in a way, and I think that matters a lot. And if you don't have that very sophisticated skill, it can cause friction and people get uneasy. They get defensive.

Yet she's not giving up. Alice recently emailed me that she had found a new international meet-up group with a wider range of events, so that she was optimistic she'd be able to meet more people with whom she might feel connected.

Cedric, from France

Cedric is a financial controller for one of France's largest corporations. He comes from a small town in the south of France. While attending business school in France, he did an internship in England and a student-exchange program in Canada. Nearing graduation, he won a scholarship to do an MBA in the United States, at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania. In fact, Cedric had always wanted to study in the United States, and felt particularly lucky to get the scholarship because as he said, "not that many people in my business school wanted to go to America." American movies, particularly 'Wall Street,' had attracted him to go to the U.S. and study 'finance.'

Cedric's official career as a migrating professional worker began in Singapore, where he was hired by an oil-exploration company to take over the position of someone who had been caught embezzling money:

Two months after my first day on the job, they offered me to go replace the financial director of Indonesia, and I was based in Singapore. The guy was fired because he was forgetting about the best practice...after four years on the job, he emulated the local practice instead of being a good corporate citizen...I think he embezzled 400 thousand dollars.

In fact, he explained to me how 'rotation' is an important way to keep such scandals at bay:

For every company, rotation is a sure way to... even, you know you don't have to go abroad. Even in a company where you are a purchasing manager, if you're three years dealing with a supplier in plastic, it's not good to stay forever because you're going to know your supplier too well. So you're going to get used to them, you're not going to challenge them very much. In addition to the aspect of getting a good relationship and getting more lenient, you're not as critical as you were before. So rotation is certainly part of this.

Because of this practice, contracts are short-term, at which point, he explained that you may either take a 'national' or 'local' contract or, 'move back to the headquarters and look for the next assignment abroad.' I asked about the difference between how he's treated if he's on a 'national contract' rather than coming from the headquarters:

Obviously you get a lot more fringe benefit if you're an expat because they have to compensate for your housing, in Indonesia for your driver and your car, a better salary. If you're a local, it's up to you to get the best deal you can, as everybody else, but obviously they wouldn't pay you as much... Also I was not used to have a driver or like a huge apartment in a 8 star hotel, so it was like "oh wow, this is really nice"

In Singapore, and later in Indonesia, Cedric said he did not need to use Internet-organized meet-ups to meet people. As he explained it:

Okay, we got I think like ten to twenty times more chances to meet people when you're a white man in Asia then when you're a white man in a Western country. Because people come to talk to you... And one factor is obviously the economic situation of the country. So they uh, of course... think that the expat is an easy target to get a ticket out of poverty.

Because of this ‘elite’ treatment – by the company and ‘locals’ – and the sense of being a part of a new ‘experience’, Cedric found it somewhat difficult to return to his previous ‘reality’ in France. Thus, upon returning, he began to seek out the meet-ups to tap back into that ‘international community’:

C Actually the first *Apero* I went [to] went very well. It was in a Canadian bar somewhere in Saint Michel... They show like sports... it’s nice. And so I went, it went very well. But the first meet up, I met mostly French people... it was funny, but it didn’t prevent me to go [again].

E So you were looking specifically for an international crowd?

C Yes

E Why?

C I don’t know... I guess I wanted to find back the kind of people I met when I was in Singapore.

E And what kind of people are those?

C Like uh, Asian people or American people who worked abroad, or even French people who were stationed abroad.

In fact, early on through meet-up, Cedric met a woman with whom he had a romantic relationship that lasted one year. He clearly sees the meet-ups as a great venue to meet women – particularly the ‘Asian’ women for whom he confesses a particular fondness. One way he does this is that he has posted on his profile that he speaks Mandarin Chinese and Bahasa Indonesian – details which turns out to be untrue when he I ask him about it face-to-face. Interestingly, and quite surprisingly, he used our interview (an evening appointment in a pub) as a mechanism to convince a Chinese-American woman – Suzy – to join us for a drink.

He had met Suzy on one of the meet-up websites but never in person, and aptly realized she would be more comfortable meeting with an unknown man if another woman was present.

He did not tell me about this, and she simply showed up in the middle of our interview.

Because they had similar careers and had both worked abroad, their conversation eventually provided me with additional insights about Cedric that I would likely not have gleaned on my own. For example, here is an excerpt from the conversation wherein I ask about his future expat plans:

E So, do you have plans to work abroad again in the future?

C I will try to, if I could. Oh (to Suzy), maybe you can give us your perspective on this: I found out that the level of middle manager in Asia has increased tremendously, because they give more and more responsibility to local people. And now to be sent as an expat, you have to be either a very excellent technical expert, like you're the only guy knowing this machine or something, or you have to be...

S Senior management.

C Senior yeah... at the VP level like Country Manager or... In my position, like financial controller, they can find plenty of MBAs because they have a lot of Chinese guys doing the MBA in the States, so why would they pick [me] up?

S And in terms of spending, they have an expat package that when they send you over you get housing, you get a country living stipend, and your expat compensation. They can hire three people for the same cost.

C Maybe ten in Indonesia. Not three but *ten*.

E Even with an MBA in Indonesia?

- C Yeah.
- S And then also you have to consider that a lot of companies are doing Joint Ventures in certain countries. It looks good that they're hiring local instead of hiring expats.
- E So, is this something that's kind of scaring the expat community, that there is this change happening... that they're not hiring expats?
- C Yes for me, it's a concern because there are less opportunities than a few years ago, I think.
- E Is this just in Asia?
- C No, I think....
- S (Interrupting): Why do you like working abroad so much? Like I don't really like working abroad. I like working in the States. I like working in New York.
- C I don't know, it's just uh, you get more, you get more responsibility, you get better uh...
- S Compensation?
- C Yeah, compensation is no question. But also there's the kind of responsibility and interaction you have...

Having another engagement, Cedric had to leave the bar before Suzy and I, and she and I continued our conversation. From her point of view, his desire to get back to Asia was very much related to the social class position he was able to live there, in comparison with that which he experienced in his own home country. She said she had seen many friends, particularly male friends, go through the same experience, and react poorly to facing the realities of their social position when they were 'sent home.'

‘Middling’ Migrants and Media Use

In addition to those who were portrayed in more depth above, I also interviewed a professional female nanny from the United Kingdom, a German female secretary for international law firms, a Mexican male who works in accounting at UNESCO, a male financial analyst from Cameroon, a Canadian woman who consults with NGOs on ‘large primate’ conservation projects in Africa, an Italian male who works as a chemical engineer for oil refinery design and construction projects, and a range of others whose thoughts and stories are also included throughout this work. While their diverse backgrounds keeps them from being easily categorized as a population to be researched along the lines of “the media uses of X group”, their participation in the meet-ups does provide a commonality through which certain questions about media use by migrants can be asked, even if generalizations cannot be easily made. And to a great extent, the *un*-generalizability is exactly the point, as it is through this conundrum that we can begin to interrogate *new* modes of living, based around individuality and ‘weak ties’ (Amit 2007), that are coming into place.

One key theme currently explored in terms of globalization and media, is the role of communications technologies in creating and maintaining Diasporic communities. For example, Karim (2006) looks at communications technologies such as the telephone, Internet, satellite TV, and other media to show how Diasporic peoples have engaged with media to create transnational communities and networks. Christiansen (2004) demonstrates that ethnic minorities in Europe appear to watch more television news from their ‘home’ country, using satellite technology, but points out that any Diasporic identity developed through media habits “may be connected, to but does not automatically follow from, their status as ethnic minorities” (186). Rather, although they gain access to satellite television

primarily to keep in touch with the ‘homeland,’ the migrant populations studied by Christiansen in Denmark demonstrate that they also access a broader variety of media overall than ‘local’ populations (they also watch some, but very little, national media in the host country). This wide-ranging access to sources means ethnic minorities are privy to and demand more wide-ranging news than people relying solely on national channels: “People with a Diaspora identity desire different priorities in, for example, the Danish public service news than what presently exists, more ...international news and a less taken-for-granted national ‘we’ in the story lines” (195). Christianson shows that the question of belonging that is at the heart of issues of transnational identity and Diaspora goes much deeper than the dichotomous assimilation or segregation binary posed by old migration models. Media use is shown as a strategic and multivalent process in building transnational identities in various phases that do not necessarily lend to a ‘home’-maintained or ‘host’-integrated identity. This transnational identity can extend beyond the realm of any particular nation-state, and an example is shown by the populations of the Christiansen study seeking ‘international news’ – rather than just homeland news – more broadly than locals. Similar results were found by Camaeur (2003) in a study of ethnic minorities and their media in Sweden, a country where one person in twenty is a foreign citizen, one in ten was born outside the country and one in five has his or her background in other countries or cultures.

Peeters & D'Haenens (2005) point out that ‘Diaspora identity’ is not a singular thing just as ‘immigrants’ are not a singular group. They study the role played by the media in the ‘integration’ of the four largest ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands: Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese and Antillean youngsters (13 to 24-year-olds), and adults (25 years of age and above). Differences are noted between age groups and also between ethnic groups on

the ways that media are used for bonding (slanting towards maintaining contacts with the homeland) or bridging (familiarizing oneself with local society and participating in it socially and culturally).

Ogunyemi (2007), who studies ethnic press in the UK, represents another level in the study of media and migration: a look at migrant-*run* media²⁹. Echchaibi (2001) sees this as an important distinction, particularly in terms of studying the agency of migrants: “research on both migrants’ representation and reception is still needed, but it is equally imperative that research energies be directed at ethnic minorities as active agents in media *production*” (298, emphasis added). He reviews the history of North African immigration to France, discusses the invisibility of North Africans in French media, and studies how North African communities have used their own radio productions to react against misrepresentation. Echchaibi sees the building of new cultures and hybridities by young North Africans in France as a more positive experience than that of the Maronites in Lebanon described by Marwan Kraidy (2005), yet this results from a focus on their *action in the production process*: “Young people...seek not to reterritorialize their ethnic group in the host country but rather to go beyond the limitations of singular belonging in a cosmopolitan fashion... They have developed a set of skills that allow them to maneuver in and between different cultures without necessarily rejecting their own” (Echchaibi, 2001:296).

The three areas that I have discussed – representation, audience use, and production – contribute to the understanding of the intersection of media and migration that constitute the core of the culture of globalization. However, despite scholars’ calls to respond to rising transnational, multinational, or supranational allegiances and “think beyond the nation”

²⁹ At times the term ‘migrant’ media is collapsed into studies of ‘ethnic’ or sometimes ‘minority’ media; this is particularly prevalent in studies conducted in the European context, as the Continent is still very much grappling with its realization that it is a ‘multi-cultural’ set of societies.

(Appadurai, 1993), most studies of migration and media continue to take national or ‘ethnic’ belonging as the primary basis for designing research, even when studying transnational contexts. For example, the studies above were focused on specific ethnicities even when then making comparisons with other specific groups. Overall, we see either nationality-specific studies (e.g. ‘Malian’ immigrants in Paris [Sargent & Larchanche-Kim, 2006]) or ethnic/regional-specific studies (e.g. ‘Latino’ immigrants in Los Angeles [Viswanath, 2000]) that are mainly focused on the role of media use and/or production in relating to a particular territory(ies). That the majority of the subjects of this study are frequent and continual migrants, who are not bound territorially other than in a temporary way (i.e. currently in Paris), begs the question of whether their media use is in any way different from the types of groups that have been the main focus of previous studies.

Different than the findings of the above-mentioned studies, most of my interview participants not only reported that they were not big TV watchers (and certainly not satellite owners). Those who did watch TV, reported mainly watching French news in the morning, in order to practice hearing the French language as much as to know the news. They were much more ‘Internet people,’ so that even if they did watch TV shows, it was typically a special occasion in which someone from home had sent a link to an online-accessible show that the person was known to love. One interview participant did tell me that she has become addicted to surfthechannel.com – and online portal to television shows and films around the world – since coming to France, and that this ‘addiction’ was mainly driven by loneliness. She had just recently found out about the meet-up groups and confessed that until then she had spent hours and hours online watching television shows because she had absolutely nothing else to do. However, this was not the norm. Most participants shared that they used

the Internet mainly to access global news, rather than ‘home’ news, sites, which were considered more thorough and applicable to their lives (both in terms of work – as pointed out by Martina from Germany – and socializing – as pointed out by Aiden from Singapore.)

The main use of the Internet, however, was interpersonal. Participants reported a high level of Facebook, Skype, MSN Messenger, and email use (and other brand variations on these types of social networking, free phone calling, and free chatting sites) to keep in touch with family and friends, and, in terms of Facebook, to collect the ever-building global network of connections in one place. Thus media were not necessarily used to keep in touch with home ‘cultures,’ as in the previous literature on migration and media has found, but rather to keep in touch with personal relationships, both at home and in other locations around the world. Many interview participants and meet-up attendees also had ‘blackberries’ and ‘i-phones’ but these communications technologies were mainly used to access the above-mentioned technologies when ‘on the go.’

Conclusion

Theorists have begun to take note of the wide range of ‘middling’ transnationalisms that include international student exchange, recruitment of ‘skilled’ labor from both developed and developing countries, new demographics of expatriates (along with new international agreements that enable their work abroad), as well as various modes of travel/tourism combined with work opportunities. While some researchers have suggested that an upsurge in middle-class migration implies the formation of a new ‘transnational middle class,’ others note that while it is increasingly people with middle-class sensibilities who migrate, this does not mean an actual new ‘class’ is forming.

Indeed, in studying the international meet-ups in Paris, the slipperiness of the concept of social class complicated any efforts to ‘place’ participants in such social categories, and positions were seen to collide in interesting ways, such as Alice expressing her current and future financial concerns even as she lived in a posh arrondissement of Paris (but in a tiny apartment) and always dressed impeccably – and even as she referred to certain other people in the community as ‘trashy’. One thing was clear, of the people participating in the meet-ups, while living lifestyles that would be called ‘elite’ in many treatments of globalization, many are far from it.

By narrating a selection of stories about people I interviewed, I hoped to demonstrate the range of social class positions in the international community of Paris, as well as the complexity with which people interact with the *idea* of elite-ness while not actually commanding the status or resources of elites. I introduced recent literature that attempts to fill in gaps in the ‘polarized’ scale that has portrayed ‘migration’ as a phenomenon of the world’s most desperate and poor, and ‘mobility’ as the activity of elites. I then illustrated stories from the international meet-ups that provide empirical support for that literature.

For example, in line with Smith and Favell’s point that international education is combined with internships that often now lead to professional employment in foreign countries, Anna and Cedric each obtained scholarships to study abroad – actions that then helped jump-start expatriate careers; Alice used a Ph.D. program in France to enable her foreign move (and the required visa); and Aiden utilized an internship procured through his master’s program to get a job contract with a French company.

The non-elite status of this group can also be seen through a lack of control over various life decisions, which was noted as a common theme among all of the people whose

stories I portrayed. For example, Marie and Anna have no control over where they are ‘sent’ to work or when their holidays are taken. Alice feels that she cannot go where she most feels ‘at home’ – the United States – because of circumstances through which she lost her Greencard; and Aiden, because he was working for a French rather than transnational corporation, felt that he needed to stay within the French system until he could get the longer-term visa (France’s version of the U.S. ‘Greencard’) that would allow him greater mobility.

Protagonists of these brief narratives also expressed financial concerns: as mentioned, Alice is generally concerned about her financial security; Aiden lives full-time in an international hostel and generally focuses on conserving money; and Cedric discussed how for him, working abroad in Asia was a move ‘up’, as his ‘expat contract’ allowed him to live as an elite, with both more responsibility and higher compensation than he would have had back home in France. Because of this, it was a difficult transition for him to return. These and other insights gleaned from interaction in the Paris international meet-ups demonstrated that the concept of ‘class’ is not one that can be usefully applied here. While the ‘scene’ and the participants may have looked elite (and even appeared on the surface to lead elite lifestyles), it was clear that they could not be easily placed in any one particular traditional social class category.

In their theory of ‘individualization’, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) claim that conceptions based on old categories such as ‘class’ (which Beck calls a ‘zombie category’) should instead be thought through differently and more imaginatively to uncover and understand new relationships to traditional ‘institutions’ in today’s world; they suggest ‘individualization’ as a process (and perhaps, result) to describe these new relationships. This

is not just to say that people are increasingly invested in their own ‘life projects’ – which has been oft noted as an evolving ontology through modernity to postmodernity (e.g. Amit & Dyck 2006; Bauman 2008; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Elliot & Lemert 2006; Machin & Van Leeuwen 2008) – but also to say that this investment, and the mandate to make it well or lose, is increasingly *built in* to life. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim claim that:

One was born into traditional society and its preconditions (such as social estate and religion). For modern social advantages one has to do something, to make an active effort. One has to win, know how to assert oneself in competition for limited resources – and not only once, but day after day. (p. 3)

The authors, referencing Hitzler (1988), refer to this mandate as a ‘do-it-yourself’ biography, which they say is,

always a “risk biography”, indeed a “tightrope biography”, a state of permanent (partly overt, partly concealed) endangerment. The façade of prosperity, consumption, glitter can often mask the nearby precipice. (in Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002:3)

This pressure, which the authors refer to as “your own life – your own failure”, was clearly noted through the interviews I conducted. Participants expressed their pasts and futures as projects of the self – as projects for which they themselves were responsible. Very little to no mention was made of institutional (e.g. nation-state) supports; in fact, when institutions were mentioned, they were typically discussed as *barriers*.

A rough pragmatic indicator for the “living one’s own life” theory is... the presence of elements of an individualistic and active narrative form in people’s own biographies. Life’s events are ascribed not mainly to “alien” causes, but to aspects of

the individual (decisions, non-decisions, omissions, capacities, incapacities, achievements, compromises, defeats). (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 25)

Alice directly expressed, “I’m an individual mix,” while other interview participants more indirectly discussed their life trajectories as paths on which they were walking alone. When references were made to supports, they were typically to corporate forms (for example, both Anna and Marie spoke of their company as taking good care of them, even though they are moved to a new country, alone, every few months, and integrated into an entirely new work team each time) or to networks of friends, family, and acquaintances, many of which are relationships maintained through communications technologies (as Marie says, she goes to sleep with her laptop and is constantly plugged in to friends and family online). In fact, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim claim that despite increasing individuality in terms of the relationship between life projects and institutional supports, people are interacting and connected to others (e.g. through networks) as much as, or perhaps more than, ever. But now, “the individual, not his or her class, becomes the unit for the reproduction of the social in his or her own lifeworld” (Beck interviewed by Rutherford 1999, in Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

The media uses discussed by my study participants also support the theory of individualization, as each person has a particular ‘media diet’ that revolves mainly around the use of personal rather than mass media channels. While past research on less privileged migrants has demonstrated that they do use media to keep in touch with the national cultures they have left behind, participants in this study seemed to use media to keep in touch with other *individuals* they have left behind. When mass media is accessed, it tends to be of a

Western, global variety, which is consistent with what has been learned about the ‘international people’ identity that this ‘group’ claims to have.

As noted through the anecdotes about Aiden and Brandon told earlier in this chapter, in the international community types of ‘capital’ such as “what makes a *real* international person?” create *new* ways of creating social hierarchies, in some ways displacing that old category of ‘class.’ Such forms are certainly related to individuality, and the idea of life (in this case, a global one) as a self-guided project. The following chapter looks more closely at how such self and group biographies are drawn on in a combination of online discourse and offline practices to create new individual and collective identities in the Paris international community.

Chapter Five

Moving 'Beyond Identity': Alternative Explorations of Belonging in an Emergent Community

The identitarian focus on bounded groupness limits the sociological – and the political – imagination, while alternative analytical idioms can help open up both.

- Brubaker & Cooper, *Beyond Identity*, 2000

I have some friends that tell me, “Now I’m an international citizen.” Well I think that it’s okay for you, but for me it doesn’t work like that.

- Victor, from Mexico

Erika: Would you mind telling me a little bit about your background...like your nationality and where you’re from?
Benjamin: Well it’s gonna be really hard – that’s a very difficult question for me.

Who are the international people? And what is the meaning of such a category while international mobility continues to require the approval of the nation-state, embedded in the national Passport? Etienne Balibar (1991) claims that the state works to “subordinate the existence of the individuals of all classes to their status as citizens of the nation-state” (p. 92). Despite some cosmopolitan trends towards calling oneself a ‘citizen of the world’, public discourse continues to portray the world as a series of nation-states, interacting with each other in new ways through globalizing processes. Yet what about the people who undertake to identify themselves as belonging to something *beyond* the nation?

Robert Reich (1991) argues that “those citizens best positioned to thrive in the world market are tempted to slip the bonds of national allegiance, and by so doing disengage

themselves from their less favored fellows” (p. 3). Is that what’s happened? Have the people in the Paris international community discontinued their links to a nationality or a homeland-identity, leaving past attachments behind? If so, what new self and collective identities do they create in place of the old, and what are the social and political implications of these new identities? And, if not, how do we look at belonging and connection in new ways, to encompass older *and* newer forms of living and identifying?

This chapter addresses these questions with a methodical look at issues of ‘identity’ noted through discourses surrounding the international meet-ups. To set up the theoretical foundation for this analysis, I begin with a brief overview of how ‘identity’ has been re-conceived in response to globalization and post-modernity. This generates a theoretical lens through which to explore issues of self and collective identities noted on the meet-up websites and from discussions with participants and event organizers.

‘Identity’ and Globalization

In a 1994 article called *Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism*, Martha Nussbaum called for the development of a “primary allegiance to the worldwide community of human beings” (Nussbaum in Robbins 1998:5). Published in the middle of a decade that saw increasingly tangible evidence of globalization, Nussbaum’s article proved controversial for suggesting modes of belonging that seemed to disavow or usurp the nation. In 1996, Appadurai tried to imagine how globalization and the so-called ‘end of history’ might instead mean a shift from the nation-state’s dominance as the *foundational* grouping for loyalty and attachments:

It may well be that the emergent postnational order proves not to be a system of homogeneous units (as with the current system of nation-states)

but a system based on *relations between heterogeneous units* (some social movements, some interest groups, some professional bodies, some nongovernmental organizations, some armed constabularies, some judicial bodies). (Appadurai 1996: 23, emphases added)

Appadurai does not imply the *end* of the nation-state. Rather, the term *postnational* suggested the nation's shift from prominence as a *primary category* of 'identity'. This shift toward multiple attachments, which may be based more on *relationships and networks* than categories, is part of the broader theories of postmodernism through which identities have become known as unstable and ever-moving, deployed in different ways for particular needs, sometimes aligning with other identities that are later in tension or operating at cross-purposes with one another.

Some of the most useful thinking for my project has come from postcolonial theorists who break apart, or fragment, the fixed identity categories that were set into place through colonizing processes. Strictly delineated categories such as race and nationality have been shifted as conceptions of 'hybrid,' 'transnational' or 'cosmopolitan' identities emerged to address the multiplicity of identity in a globally interconnected world (e.g. Bhabha 1991; Ong 1999; Christiansen 2004; and Camaur 2003 respectively). Stuart Hall (1996) points out that rather than *contained* by 'identity,' these new positions should be seen as continuously developing and transforming '*identifications*' (p. 2).

Hall (1990) explains that 'identifications' have both discursive and psychoanalytic constructions, drawing on shared characteristics with other people or groups but are always in process, never complete, and can always be 'won' or 'lost' – but at the same time always require an ambivalent relationship to a 'constitutive outside' (p. 3). He points out that such a

concept of identity, constructed through difference, is strategic and positional: If “throughout their careers, identities can function as points of identification and attachment only *because* of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render ‘outside,’” (Hall, 1996:5), then identities will always necessarily be destabilized by what is left out. All subjects are constantly in articulation with discursive formations, whether struggling, resisting, negotiating, or accommodating the relation. Homi Bhabha (1994) refers to such constitutive processes as ‘strategies of selfhood,’ which he says may be worked either on a singular ‘self’ or communal group level.

Bhabha focuses on ‘cultural’ identity as a strategy for creativity and invention in response to new social challenges. He claims that identities are ‘fragmented’ consciously and strategically in a communal effort to create new forms of solidarity. Calling this creative process ‘hybridity,’ Bhabha says it refers to a “third space, which enables other positions to emerge” (interviewed in Rutherford, 1998: 211). These ‘in-between spaces’ allow either singular or communal ‘strategies of selfhood’ to operate in “collaboration, or contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (p. 2). Such strategies are used to create social *differences* that go beyond received notions of cultural tradition and celebrate the emergence of new forms.

Hall and Bhabha are both useful for considering new forms of belonging and identifying emerging in the Paris international meet-up scene, through participation in online and offline groups that claim to be *open* to people of all backgrounds regardless of racial or national identification. Envisioning the meet-ups as ‘in-between spaces’ encourages an analysis of ‘identity’ that seeks to understand not only how singular and communal forms of attachment are strategically constructed, but also to remember that these constructions are

new and different, with potential social and political implications. This leads to certain questions, for example, *how* are such identifications enacted strategically, and *why*? And to what extent do subjects continue to be positioned by ‘older’ identity categories such as nationality and race? Are older categories simply reconfigured while maintaining relevancy in shifted or multiple ways? Should ‘new identities’ simply be added to a mix of existing typologies or does the emergence of new collectivities and practices tell us something important about social changes and belonging in relation to globalization? This exercise also provides an occasion to question the ‘reality’ of the meet-ups against their own rhetoric, to inquire to what extent they provide a space for a broad group of backgrounds to mix, or to what extent people must identify with Western values to feel at home in this ‘cosmopolitan’ space.

To think through these questions methodically, I utilize Brubaker and Cooper’s (2000) article, *Beyond Identity*. They argue against the concern with new ‘identities’ *as such*, claiming that to continue to use the category of ‘identity’ for analysis serves simply to reify older identity categories even as scholars are attempting to displace such categories. I use the approach elaborated in their article to guide a more deep exploration of the complex processes, affiliations, and exclusions that are encompassed by that catchall phrase – identity – so easily drawn on to refer to group attachments and self-awareness.

In proposing that researchers dispose of identity as a category of analysis, Brubaker and Cooper contend that in spanning use as a category of social and political *practice* as well as *analysis*, identity is simply too many things to too many people. They suggest separating usage of the identity concept into three categories of analysis: 1) ‘identification and categorization,’ 2) ‘self-understanding and social location,’ and 3) ‘commonality,

connectedness, groupness.’ When all of those forms are collapsed under the umbrella term ‘social construction of identity,’ they point out that “*linking* and *separating* get called by the same name, making it harder to grasp the processes, causes, and consequences of differing patterns of crystallizing difference and forging connections” (p. 23, emphases added). This approach to analysis also provides a method through which Bhabha’s and Hall’s theoretical concepts may be duly considered.

As noted in the quote at the top of this chapter, analyzing collectivities in more flexible and multiple ways is meant to open up analyses of their sociological and political implications to more imaginative perspectives. I approach an understanding of ‘identity’ emerging in the international community in Paris through the ‘alternative analytical idiom’ Brubaker and Cooper provide. Thus, rather than discussing the implications of a new identity of ‘international people’ and ‘international community’ by taking the existence of such an identities at face value, I use this chapter to explore the processes and motivations by which people come to identify themselves with (and thereby, construct) the categories of the group; the ways in which different participants understand themselves as belonging in that group; and the way a group itself is manifested through connections, commonalities *and* exclusions. Recalling Bhabha, I explore the ‘strategies of selfhood’ at work as participants construct their ‘global selves’ while also creating a collective international ‘we’, and assess how differentiating issues of nationality, regionality, language, and mobility are confronted alongside efforts to employ commonality and community – all the while creating a constitutive yet flexible ‘outside.’

Identification & Categorization: Creating the ‘International Person’

Brubaker and Cooper point out that the historical force of powerful institutions, such as the State, in creating codified, objectified systems of categorization must be acknowledged alongside the importance of separating “*self*-identification and the identification and categorization of *oneself by others*” (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000: 15, emphasis added). They pose two overarching forms that encompass modes of identification: Relational and Categorical. Through relational forms, “one may identify oneself (or another person) by position in a relational web (a web of kinship, for example, or of friendship, patron-client ties, or teacher-student relations)” (p. 15). On the other hand, through categorical forms, one may identify oneself (or another person) by “membership in a class of persons sharing some categorical attribute (such as race, ethnicity, language, nationality, citizenship, gender, sexual orientation, etc)” (p. 15). These modes prove to be particularly vexing in a community where origins, routes traveled, languages amassed, and a hierarchy of mobility (such as the emphatic declaration, ‘I am not a tourist’) are discussed in multiple ways to articulate identification with a new set of ‘global’ categories and relations. In fact, while beginning with consideration of Relational and Categorical modes of identification, I will later argue that two additional modes – Experiential and Functional – are highly important for identification with the international community.

A desire to foster relational identifications leads many ‘foreigners’ in Paris to join web groups that promise access to an offline social scene. The sense of a connected community of people – a relational mode of identification – is created on the websites through the presence of a ‘members’ list – including names, photos and other personal

information presented in common templates – along with event listings, and continually-updated member quotes. The leader of the International Nomad Community pointed out to me how this effect is compounded by the way the Internet sites work:

He said it's also problematic because people will come across the page online, express interest, and then move on, but that the list keeps growing (their names are never deleted) so it looks like there is all this active interest but really it's not like that 'group' is sitting out there waiting (Field-notes, October 11, 2008).

Through interplay between the official discourse of the websites (identification of the 'community' as represented by group organizers through the writing of 'welcome' and 'about us' text) and self-identifications of group members elaborated through the writing of personal profile information and comments, an 'international person' emerges as the category of person that *belongs* in the group. Analysis of the websites, later triangulated with discussions among participants in offline events, illustrates how traditional and alternative identifications and categories collide through attempts to mobilize new forms of belonging.

My analysis begins with the content of the web-groups, starting with the way that groups set up identifications through 'about us' text and the specific questions asked in the web templates in order to construct a category called the 'international person.' Keeping in mind Brubaker and Cooper's argument that new efforts to build collective self-understanding through the work of identification should consider "authoritative, institutionalized modes of identification *together with* alternative modes involved in the *practices of everyday life*" (16, emphases added), I look at how traditional categories such as nationality and other 'origins-based' identifications are integrated into the discourse about this new form.

‘International people’: Old and New Identifications Collide

“One may be called upon to identify oneself – to locate oneself vis-à-vis known others, to situate oneself in a narrative, to place oneself in a category – in any number of different contexts” (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000:14). This need to identify oneself categorically can happen in any number of places – social, institutional, geographic (i.e. borders), etc. This section questions how this identification works on the websites studied.

The template-basis of online participant profiles creates ‘categories’ that catalogue parallel information about members, and when new members join they are asked to provide answers situating themselves within these categories. Below are the template questions for the four MeetUp groups analyzed, as well as the two independent organizations that have member profiles, InterNations and Horn’s Club. Each uses the template questions to elicit ‘profile’ information in various ways:

MeetUp: Expats Paris: *(Open-ended responses filled in by new member)*

- Introduction
- Favorite restaurant or pub in Paris?
- When did you get to Paris?
- Where are you from?

MeetUp: International Events in Paris: *(Open-ended responses)*

- Introduction
- Your mail???
- Activities/events you like?? Your age??...(at least 20 to 25, 30 to 35 etc.)
- Your nationality??? Languages you speak???

MeetUp: Paris New-in-Town: (Open-ended responses)

- Introduction
- Which country did you come from? Where have you lived?
- How long have you been living in Paris?

MeetUp: INC/International Nomad Community: (Open-ended responses)

- Introduction
- What's your idea of fun?
- What are you doing now?
- Where have you been all your life?

The independent sites that have profiles do not have the open-ended responses of the meet-up sites, but rather have pre-determined categories that must be selected from a drop-down menu:

Horn's Club: (Answers chosen from pre-determined drop-down menu)

- Age:
- Where were you born?:
- Profession:
- Languages:

InterNations (Answers chosen from pre-determined drop-down menu)

- Name and Photo
- Country of birth (w/ representational flag)
- Country of current residency (w/ representational flags)
- What makes me a global mind: (*the only open-ended part of the profile*)
- Nationality? (w/ representational flag)

- Residence (*w/ representational flag*)
- Countries lived in (*w/ representational flags*)
- Languages (*w/ representational flag*)

On the meet-up.com sites (the first four listed above), by providing open-ended answer space rather than pre-determined drop-down menus for answering questions relating to background and identification, groups allow participants to categorize themselves.

However, for many of the members there is a relationship between how they do this and the series of categories or identifications portrayed by the organizers in the ‘about us’ text.

Answers to these questions demonstrate a connection between *categories* used in official group discourse and categories drawn on by members to describe themselves. For example, Expat Paris’ ‘about us’ text says:

Expats Paris includes expats from around the world, some in Paris for short stints and some for decades. Most have a lot in common, starting with *carte de séjour* stories and going from there. Join us sometime for dinner or a picnic and tell us yours.

The eight of us who organize Expats Paris events reflect the diversity of the rest of the group, which has over 1,200 members from over 50 countries. We have all lived abroad in a lot of places doing a lot of different things and are all multilingual... and not all of us are native English speakers. We welcome anyone who is, has been or wants to be part of the expatriate experience to join us (meetup.com/ExpatsParis).

This ‘about us’ text sets up the category/identification (those who belong) of ‘expats’ – past, current and future – as a group of people who are multilingual and have lived abroad on many occasions. Thus when new members fill in open-ended profile questions about themselves, many (including French ‘locals’) refer to themselves as ‘expats’ – discussed

immediately below – and many find ways to list languages spoken and places lived (which will be discussed later). For some examples, see the following profile ‘Introduction’ sections taken from the Expats Paris site:

*Jennifer*³⁰: Because I am an expat in Paris!

Joanna: I would like to meet other expats to enjoy Paris together.

Dave: I’ve been an expat my whole life! Would like to meet some people while i’m here in Paris.

Paul C.: As a seasoned expat in asia for 10+year i know you have to make an effort to meet new and interesting people when you start over in a new city. so this is the starting point for me in paris.

Ashish: I am Indian by birth but have lived on 3 continents. I would love meet other Expats in Paris to share their experiences as well as meet newer people in Paris from different parts of the world...

Vincent: I am 34 and I used to be a French expat in the US. I would like to socialize with the Expat community currently living in the Paris area. I work in sales & marketing.

Alex: Professional expat lived in 3 different countries for the past 2 years

Andy: Made the move from London in 2002 and I'm still loving it! Look forward to meeting other expats in Paris.

Florian: Hi, just moved from Munich to Paris as expatriate. Having a half-korean half-german background myself, I'm always happy to meet new people from all over the world.

³⁰ Names taken from websites are NOT changed – because this information is publicly accessible.

Nicole: American who has lived in Chile and third time living in Paris. Arrived earlier this year, but need to meet more people! And missing the expat crowd. :)

Sophie: Bonsoir! My name is Sophie and I am French. I have recently returned to France after working in the UK for 14 years. I long to speak English again and share my experiences with fellow expats!

Marguerite: I am an expat living in Paris - seemed like a great meet-up group to join!

Luana: I'm used to be sort of an expat everywhere I go...

No one on the Expat Paris 'members' area refers to him/herself as a 'nomad,' even though many of the people recount multiple geographic moves in their profiles. On the other hand, on the International Nomad Community site, plenty of people use this word to refer to themselves. This again indicates a relationship between the categories used in the 'about us' text and those used by the members when they write their profiles. The INC 'about us' says the following:

The International Nomad Community draws its members in the broadest sense from the International Community, embracing both locals and expats with equal fervour, and with a specifically 'Epicurean' flavour. The aim is to promote the sampling of the best, most inspiring and motivating of what each place where we land has to offer, and to recognize those absolutely unique benefits that each individual and each location represent, without regard to borders, prejudices, perceived limitations, or fear. Our goal is to celebrate the uniqueness of each individual and their life experiences and thereby take everyone to a higher flight level (meetup.com/dotinc).

This text combines categories of ‘nomad,’ ‘expatriate,’ and ‘the international community.’ At the same time, it celebrates ‘unique individuals’ and ties the knowing and appreciating of such people with a moral message about multiculturalism and cultural flexibility, which is attached to attaining a higher level in life. Many of the member profiles also draw on these categories and moral ethic. First, the below excerpts from the ‘introduction’ portion of profiles indicate an extensive use of the word ‘nomad’ to categorize oneself and others:

Toto: I am discovering the nomad side of my life.

Paramita: An Indonesian trying to embrace Paris. Want to make friends with fellow global nomads. Aim to pursue enjoyable life that provides meaning.

Nathalie: I have been a "modern" nomad for the last 4 years, now that I am finally stranded in Paris with an idea of settling, the nomad life starts calling again ... not to be too tempted in leaving again, I wanna meet fun people to share experiences with!

Anaëke: Je m'inscris dans ce groupe parce que j'ai une âme nomade et je suis internationale de par mes parents et mon vécu.

Christian: To share fun evenings with my fellow nomads.

Caroline: I am French but I leaved in England. I am addicted to travel which is why the word "nomad" stoked my attention. I have just started my own travel company.

Mallika: Hi, having lived in over 10 different countries...I would firmly classify myself as an International Nomad. I have recently moved to Paris and looking forward to making new friends.

Kevin: I am restless. Jobs, homes, love... Commitment seems to last about 2 years. My current employer seems to get it and has set me on a nomadic expat path.

Penelope: I am new to France and looking to meet fun and interesting people while I am here. I have been and probably will always be a nomad of sorts.

Carla: Hello everyone, I'm pleased to join this meetup just because I try to live the nomadic lifestyle as much as possible.

Pria: Never in one place and I have not been in this planet that long either...so I am a real nomad having hopped from Malaysia to OZ to Thailand, Singapore, Dubai, Paris and alternating between Hanover.

Other profiles use related words to *imply* belonging to a nomadic lifestyle. For example:

Priya: I am trotting the globe literally and Paris I cannot live without. I am thinking of camping here permanently at some point. Yes I would like to get to know more people and have fun by the 'campside':)

Sarah: Hi I am Sara and seem to have itchy feet but love Paris and would like to meet like-minded people.

Ian: I used to belong to the Fukawi tribe, but they would not have me.

CouCouCachoo: Hi there. A well-respected French psychic told me I was born under the card of the Chariot and I just can't stay still.

Arvind: hi, i've lived in 3 diff continents and don't have a place called home anymore. This is my second assignment in france. Look forward to meeting everyone. cheers !"

The same goes for International Events in Paris. The ‘about us’ text sets out goals for the group, using categories such as ‘expats’ and ‘international people,’ which are then reproduced in member profiles. The group ‘about us’ goal states:

We are an Association for international people and our goal is to help integration of the expats living in Paris by developing an active and prominent international network.

We organize events and activities for internationals also in partnership with other similar associations (expat.meetup.com/103/).

A selection of member quotes again indicates how participants draw on these categories when they describe themselves:

Florent: Want to meet international new friends here in Paris :o) I'm a citizen of Earth... Actually I'm French but I've spent the 2 last years in New York City and feel more international than French.

Charles To meet engaging, international people.

Martin: I want be international ! :)

E: To connect with like-minded international people

Monique: Hello, After 1 year in Milan with people coming from all over the world, I would like to keep this nice atmosphere specific to international environment!!!! :-)

Flavia: I feel very much at home and enjoy very much international environments and meeting people from all over the world.

Barbara: Wishing to meet international people open minded, communicative...

Rafal: To continue meeting great international people, wherever I move. This time it's Paris, for 6 months.

Elisa: To meet international people.

Cecile: I am french but have lived many years abroad and miss the "international" vibe! Looking forward to meeting you all.

Marie: I lived in the States and in England for about 2 years total. I love traveling and meeting international people. Any experience is good to share.

Isabelle: I'd like to meet international people, and this group will give me this occasion.

Florence: To discuss with International people

Pascal: After a few years in San Francisco, and back in Paris, I 'd like to connect to people with international profiles.

Rebecca: To make more international friends!

Although most responses correspond to the identifications set out by the group's 'about us', this can also happen playfully. For example, Alisa answers the International Nomad Community's question, "Where have you been all your life?" with, "Pretty much where I wanted to be," while ThomasVictorio responds, "Dreaming." Or, Edward H: "Mostly inside my own skin, with occasional exceptions." This plays into the ethic of 'unique individual' that is also portrayed as part of belonging to the group in the 'about us' text.

Self-described categories are also used to illustrate an appreciation of people from different backgrounds, which attaches the self to the groups' ethic. For example, Anna from International Events in Paris says:

Greetings from a "Citizen of the world"! Looking forward in meeting this multicultural group... A bientot!

Discourse on these websites demonstrates how belonging based on a sort of 'global citizenship' is still largely dependent on a categorical vocabulary articulated through the national. Online, displaying an array of 'origins' becomes important to each web-group's claim to being 'open' and 'international'; and to identify as global, members must be categorized via their experiences with the national. All of the sites deal in various ways with this problem of origins and nationality; for example, InterNations' use of multiple flags to visually represent the diversity of each member's experiences.

A basic question among people whose main commonality is that they are foreigners in the place where they are meeting becomes: "Where are you from?" On the other hand, the question can be particularly difficult for some participants – many of whom have lived in multiple countries, and many who are what is known in such circles as 'Third Culture Kids' (TCKs), themselves brought up by internationally migrating parents. Based on my own experience as a researcher trying to gain access by joining the online groups, I can attest to how this issue can cause confusion. For example, this is demonstrated through the following excerpt from Field-notes written as I joined the online communities:

To join the Horn's Club, I was instructed to submit a photo and answer a series of required drop-down menu questions, among which was, 'Where were you born?' When my answers to the questions were converted to 'general statistics' on my member profile, 'Where were you born?' had been converted to a category called 'Origin'. Thus, although I was born in Germany to American parents, and only lived there for the first year and a half of my life, later growing up in Wyoming, in the

United States, my 'origin' was listed as German and a German flag-icon was posted next to my photograph. Something similar happened on InterNations – but there the issue became even more confusing when the organizer's page-long 'Welcome' message was emailed to me in German, a language I do not speak. (Field-notes, July 2008).

The open-response format of the meetup.com profile templates instead allows group organizers and their participants to employ strategies to get around this problem of pre-determined categorical origins. For example, the open-endedness of Expats Paris' question, "Where are you from?" invites varied responses. Some participants choose to avoid the question altogether, providing answers like that from Abi, who says, "I am a Citizen of the World," or Ann who responds that she is from "Venus, Babylon county." Other responses are straight forward, such as:

Dharamvir: INDIA

Sibel: Istanbul, Turkey

Shin: Japan

Damdy: Laos

However, many participants take advantage of the open-endedness to provide multiple responses, such as:

Laura: I am from London, UK and I am happy to have returned to Europe after living and working for 3 years in Beijing (Peking).

Ozge: Originally from Turkey. My mother is from Kritos island of Greece and I live in USA since I left for College. I also lived in Russia for a year and

Geneva for 3 months. I speak some French but here I am a student at Sorbonne so hoping to learn more.

Karin: Switzerland - Basel. Spent last years in Zurich, Chile, and Buenos Aires.

Diane: I've lived in London, studied in Krefeld (Germany) and York, but spent most of my adult life in Amsterdam.

Rather than asking “Where are you from?”, International Nomad Community asks “Where have you been all your life?” – an expanded background question that goes with the ethic of mobility suggested by the group’s title. Responses include:

Paramita: Indonesia: Jakarta, Bali. United States: NYC, Boulder.

Mikaela: Traveling in about 31 countries so far, the last one being Cambodia, the next one I have no idea.

Anaëke: I was born in Texas. I grew up in France then went to L.A. for 12 years and have been back in Paris for 3.

Christian: Well, traveling: UK, Germany, NL, Africa, Spain, USA...

Dirk: German from Frankfurt/Munich studied/worked in Canada, US and South America.

Alex: Germany, USA, France, Singapore

Penelope: USA Wyoming 0-7 years old Rural Missouri 7-18 years old Pittsburg, PA 18-22 years old California 22-26 years old France- now at 26 Italy in the fall of 2008 Who knows???????????

Ina: Originally I am from Germany, but don't seem wanting to stay anywhere longer than a few years - lived in the UK, France, Ireland, Liechtenstein.

Cinnia: traveling and living in many countries such as chile, italy, spain, belgium,

luxembourg, tunisia, and france.

And again there are also the playful yet evasive responses that correspond to the *nomad ethic*:

Christian: All over the world

Mallika: Everywhere

Sarah: Do you know it is hard to remember?

Nathalie: Too many places to sum up

Other meet-up sites have similar set-ups for eliciting the background information in the open-ended format. For example, the initial question on Paris New-in-Town, “Which country did you come from? Where have you lived?” is a double entendre that can refer to a country of origin or a location from which a person has recently arrived to Paris.

By expanding the question-types to account for multiple geographical moves and attachments to place, the meet-up sites allow an explanation of background that combines ‘roots and routes’ (Gilroy 1993; Clifford 1997). These questions invite the mapping of routes, and many respondents indeed provide such mapping, which paints a picture of the person’s global experiences. There were many such examples above, and here is another, provided by Arvind: “USA, Canada, Mexico, France, and India for work and another 20 countries for vacation/travel.”

International Events in Paris combines a question about a person’s “nationality” – which, being open-ended allows for multiple answers – along with a request for “languages you speak,” suggesting a mapping of routes can be attained through demonstrating language competencies. Language performances construct maps of international experience, with many members either providing a *list* of language that they speak – e.g. Claude, who answers

the question with, “Franco-Uruguayen: Français, anglais, espagnol, italien, portugais” – or actually *mixing* languages in their prose. For example, this introduction in which Ann combines Chinese, French, English, Portuguese, Spanish, and Italian to demonstrate her international credentials:

Ni hao ! Ma culture est française mas nas minhas veias o sangue é português. Lived for a while in London, je suis maintenant de retour à Paris. Mis amigos vienen de todas las partes del mundo. Babilona é la mia patria³¹!

Overall, members juxtapose roots *and* routes to identify with categories presented by the sites, such as ‘global nomads’ and ‘international people.’ Moreover, by expanding from origins and locales to include experiential-based and cultural capital-infused responses, a certain *global pedigree* emerges as the norm to which members aspire. That pedigree allows a person to identify oneself with the categories of ‘the international community’ – expatriates, global nomads, and overriding all other terms: ‘international person.’

Conversely, in face-to-face conversation, when the template categories and ‘about us’ text are not involved, it is not nearly so common to hear people refer to themselves as ‘international people.’ Although there are still frequent yet vague references to *others* in the group as being ‘the internationals,’ this is combined with a high level of use of ‘nationality’ as a specific category for classifying both the self and others. This lends support to my suggestion that the template categories, ‘about us’ text, and the conglomerated effect of seeing other member responses archived on the sites creates the *sense* of a population of international people, while the people themselves may in fact identify themselves much differently when left to their own devices.

³¹ Hello! My culture is French but my ancestry is Portuguese. I lived for awhile in London, I am now returning to Paris. My friends come from all parts of the world. Babylon is my homeland. (This is a general translation provided by the author).

Finally, another categorization that emerged as important to many people at the international meet-ups was based on a *negation of* rather than *identification with* a category – that is the category of ‘tourist.’ Expatica, a large global organization that serves mainly as an information clearinghouse for current and future expatriates, hosts an annual “I Am Not a Tourist Fair” for foreigners residing in cities around the world. Also, while participants whom I met both on- and offline indicated a desire to make the most of the opportunity of living in Paris (and France more generally) by seeing and participating in what the culture had to offer, this was also frequently accompanied by emphatic declarations of belonging to a category other than ‘tourists’. For example, these excerpts from interviews:

Marie: I don’t know, I’m not a tourist, because I always feel myself...I really adapt to the country easily... For example I love just walking around the city and just uh, I don’t take a map or do the touristy thing. But I just walk out of the house and I do what I feel.

Marco: And that’s something that expat people can do because they are not tourists and they are inside the city or the country enough to feel the differences, and say what makes the difference sometimes...

Nashita: When I left France the last time, I remember telling like all these [friends]: “I will never be a tourist in this country.” And coming back, I don’t feel like a tourist. When I’m in the US, I’m not a tourist. So that’s the other thing – the country that you’ve lived or stayed or whatever, for an extended time, you’ll never be a tourist over there.

The *ways* through which people are mobile (e.g. not being tourists) along with the strategies they draw on to demonstrate their global pedigrees (e.g. the sharing of routes and

language performances) indicate that another form of identification in addition to Brubaker and Cooper's 'Categorical' and 'Relational' modes is important to this community. I call this mode 'Experiential' because identification with the community relies so much on having had certain types of international experiences (or, if those experiences have been limited, identification relies on having the ability to strategically highlight the experiences that *have* been had, or to share plans, openness, and desire for having more such experiences in the future).

Experiential identification as a new mode does not diminish the importance of Categorical and Relational modes of identification – although those modes have certainly changed. It should be clear from the previous pages that through the international meet-ups, new Categorical identifications are formed, such as that of the 'international person'. Relational modes of identification combine old forms but are also now connected to more complex relational modes, known as 'networks' (This was illustrated by Marie, in the previous chapter, when she talked about how her computer is her best friend because it keeps her in touch with all her friends and family around the world, while also explaining how she uses Facebook to manage the 'global network' she has built.)

Networking and 'Functional' Modes of Identification

Another mode of identification I noted emerging through this project is what I'll call 'Functional,' and which will become more clear in following sections of this chapter. The Functional mode relates to the *motives* that different participants have for joining the groups. Many participants state an interest in trying to *create* relational identifications in a place where they have arrived alone and do not yet have a 'network.' Having a 'network' can refer

to either personal or business relationships, and in fact the two realms often cross. An interview with Nick – a Korean-American lawyer who has lived in Sweden, Germany, and France – parts of which are narrated below, indicates the importance ‘networks’ play in his life, and their connection to the meet-ups.

Nick is a lawyer from Detroit, in the United States, who has lived in Paris for five years – one of the more long-term participants I met at the meet-ups. As his parents are from Korea, he grew up speaking both Korean and English, and then had opportunities to study French, Spanish, and German when he did his undergraduate degree at Harvard. There he majored in Biochemistry and later found a job at a research lab in California, where he befriended colleagues from Sweden. These friends helped him obtain a summer research position at a university in Sweden, where he learned Swedish and, in his residence hall, met new friends from all over the world.

This was Nick’s first experience living abroad, although in high school he had toured Europe with his class orchestra, and after graduation had traveled independently in Europe thanks to a travel scholarship he won. From Sweden, he attempted to move to Paris in 1994, but with no connections and no pre-arranged job, found it impossible to get work. Mutual friends met through ‘the Sweden experience’ helped him procure a job in Germany, where he worked for one year before returning to the US to attend law school. A summer internship with an international law firm allowed him to spend half the summer in New York and half in Paris; after graduating, he worked at the same firm and eventually convinced them to transfer him full-time to the Paris office where he has been ever since.

Nick’s experiences have taught him the importance of networking, and he is heavily involved with various types of meet-ups. He also frequently hosts parties himself, which he

publicizes on the more exclusive networking site, A Small World (including when he himself is traveling; for example, he recently hosted a dinner party while in Argentina). He is also a frequent attendee of InterNations events as well as some of the meet-ups where he can practice language skills, such as a Spanish-language meet-up. His motivation for his continual use of social networking is, in his own words:

I like traveling. I like languages. I like just meeting people from different places and having friends from cool places.

Another reason relates to the high turnover of friends in Paris:

You know, so all these people who've been in Paris, that I knew... I mean, there are always people leaving, right, so, you know, I think I had a *list*. And like every time someone would leave I would put their name on the list. Maybe it was like forty people who have left, that I know.

On the other hand, now he has a 'global network':

All these people that I've known here, they're like all over the place: Dubai, Singapore, the US, Brazil. Yeah. All these people that I've known here, they're just scattered all over.

In terms of the future, Nick is not quite sure what comes next. After all the moving around, he's finally become rather comfortable in Paris. But at the same time, he thinks it could be "fun to try something really new", like Hong Kong. And because of the networking available through the Internet, and the networks he's already built, he feels he could adapt to any new place if necessary:

If I had to go somewhere else for some reason, like for a job, I would be happy going there and I'm sure, you know, it would take a little while to settle in but, I think it

would be – with all the stuff now, these networks, and people I know already – I think it'd be fun.

In addition to *building networks* and *networking*, people utilize the groups to meet functional needs such as looking for friends; being 'with people' without needing a plan or a social circle of one's own; looking for romantic partners; looking for jobs or other career-related contacts; practicing English; and/or to seeking out people who can provide information and advice on issues related to living abroad. These functional points came up continually, although at one particular Expats Paris monthly cocktail, many seemed to emerge in one night. Below is an excerpt from my Field-notes of that evening:

A woman from Oklahoma said she came to the event to be able to socialize with people that she could speak to in English while she was working on her French on the side. She said her office is in the suburbs but that she lives in Paris...so she wanted to meet people in Paris. Many people around, joining the conversation, agreed that they had no time to meet people because they work, so they came to this event. Someone said it's especially hard when your colleagues are mostly French and they go home to their families at night.

The woman from Morocco mentioned that it was good for her to try to come to an event like this because otherwise she's just always home talking on Skype with her sister, who still lives in Morocco. Earlier in the evening, when we first met, she had told me that she had moved to Paris to grow her small telecomm firm (based in Morocco) and said straight away that she had come to the event for "networking." We talked a bit more and she said she'd been in Paris for two years, but that she was often traveling for work, and often just working in general, so that this event was

nice because it allowed her to get out and socialize and relax with people (in addition to the hope to get some networking out of it). This was her first time at an Expats Paris event, but she liked the idea of having a reason and a place to go out. We then met a guy from Colombia, who had been living in Paris for 8 years. He's an automotive engineer. It was his first time at a meet-up too. He said he thought it would be good to meet people, and also to practice his English, since he speaks French at work and thus cannot practice there. He felt his opportunities for advancement in his career would depend on 'having English.'

Later in the evening, I met a co-organizer of the meet-up, a man from Southern California, who confessed he got involved a few years after his divorce. He said after the divorce, he tried online dating but hated it so he felt the meet-ups were a better way to meet people...because you're in groups, and you're doing things, instead of just meeting for a date, which can have so much pressure. (Field-notes, September 17, 2008).

In looking at the ways that identification and categorization work in the making of the *international person*, I have looked at problems of categorized origins in the international community and strategic responses to this problem, such as the combining of roots and routes, as well as performing language competencies, to articulate belonging to the 'global'; strategies have also included negations of other categories, such as against being considered a 'tourist.' Through this exercise, I have noted two additional modes of identification: 'Experiential' and 'Functional.'

Brubaker and Cooper maintain that a focus on how people categorize themselves and others, along with acknowledging how they are also positioned by categories and identifications attributed to them by institutions (and how they creatively work to go beyond such identifications), ‘invites us to specify the agents that do the identifying...And it does not presuppose that such identifying will necessarily result in internal sameness’ (2000: 14). This assertion that within a collectivity there will be many ways of identifying, leads to the next section that utilizes their method, wherein I will look at ‘Self Understanding and Social Location’ as it plays out for some members of the group.

Self Understanding & Social Location: An ‘International *Self*’?

So, what is a global nomad? What is an international person? While these are *group* categories, as demonstrated through the meet-ups’ adoption of those monikers, there is also a sense of the unbounded ‘free-floating individual’ (Palmer 1990) tied into these terms.

Brubaker and Cooper note:

If one wants to trace the process through which persons sharing some categorical attribute come to share definitions of their predicament, understanding of their interest, and a readiness to undertake collective action, it is best to do so in a manner that highlights the *contingent and variable relationship* between mere categories and bounded, solidary groups. (2000:9, emphases added)

Online, members’ introduction messages contain an overwhelming use of the pronoun ‘I’ along with frequent references to temporary connections to place and people. However, this is not presented as aloneness or loneliness. There are also many references to jobs coupled with allusions to future plans, creating a sense of security within the unknown.

The dominant attitude is one of comfort, almost nonchalance, in regards to the displacement that international migration entails. Take, for example, Alisa’s post at the International Nomad Community:

Will wander in from Tokyo in about a month. I had a great meet-up experience there and look forward to the same again in a brand new city.

The sense of casualness to international relocation, as referenced through Alisa’s “will wander in...” is a key part of presenting the *international self*. In fact, on very few of the member profiles can one find reference to the loneliness or hardships that could be expected to accompany solo relocation to a foreign city, although there is frequent mention of the *functional* role the meet-up should meet – for example, to provide a ready-made pool of friends for the person who is dropping by. Overall, the international self (or global nomad) as presented online is comfortable in her global shoes; she speaks several languages and she’s already done it all before. She simply need drop in and connect. There is the sense that, in the ‘international community,’ she already knows what she’ll find; she’ll be at home.

In contrast to the dominant attitude of the capable and casual free-floating international self that emerges *online*, many (but not all) interview participants confessed to loneliness as the key problem that threatens to interrupt their plans to live as ‘international people’. This is demonstrated in the following excerpt from my interview with Martina, from Germany – a multilingual secretary for international law firms who was living in Paris for the second time and had also lived in London, Rome, and the Caribbean:

M Even the most beautiful cities in the world are not anything if you don’t know people. And it’s nice to look at but it loses interest quite quickly, and you have to think, what are you doing here?

- E Yeah, if you feel like an ‘outsider.’
- M And even, like next week there is this Carr’s MeetUp [hosted by Expats Paris] – and I don’t even know if there will be anyone there that I’ve already met, but I’m already looking in my calendar and, “Oh!! I’ll be there! I have a plan for next week!”
- E Exactly, it’s true.
- M It’s something to look forward to. It will be a nice evening. It’s relaxing. It will be okay... You know you’re not alone. There’s so many other people from anywhere and you can actually...just a little excuse to start talking. Not even oh, let talk about this and that topic. No – it’s just we meet at 8:00 at that shop and that’s it and that’s enough to connect people.
- E Just to feel like you have a piece of something.
- M Yeah.

Cut off from many categorical identities, a ‘global loner’ *self* is supposed to belong anywhere and nowhere at once, yet there are emotional costs to this position, such as loneliness and a feeling of being *disconnected*. As noted in the conversation excerpted above, personal conversations revealed a more vulnerable side to the global nomad – the *need to be with people*, no matter what the conversation is about.

Brubaker and Cooper point out that the self is always positioned in a field of others – ‘social location’ – in terms of nationality, race, gender, class, etc. This part of their framework leads to many paradoxes in terms of my project – as the international self, meant to fit in anywhere, must also navigate pre-determined assumptions based on social location (for example, this was evident in the narrative about Alice in the previous chapter). In

addition to the more fixed categories, this issue also plays out in terms of ‘reason for being in Paris³², (having a ‘good’ job, or as a drifter, etc); Western versus non-Western perspectives (and European versus non-European); and breadth of ‘worldly’ knowledge and experiences (as discussed in terms of the pedigrees of internationalism performed through routes and languages in the previous section).

To provide a narration of how these issues can play out in terms of the international self and ‘social location’, I first present below the story of Benjamin – one of my interview participants and a frequent familiar face at the meet-ups.

Benjamin from Canada-Germany-Japan

Benjamin, a ‘Third Culture Kid’ who has lived in multiple countries, none of which are his parents’ native lands, has all the sophistication, skills, and comfort necessary to thrive in the ‘drop-in’ cocktail party conversation of the meet-ups. He is an economist with France’s largest company – the oil company, Total – a job that has him currently based in Paris but which also involves a lot of international travel, particularly to Africa. He is the epitome of the ‘international self.’ This is his background, in his own words:

My parents are German and Japanese. I was born in Montreal. I lived in Montreal for three years, Vancouver for five years, Saudi Arabia for seven years... then back to Vancouver. Then I spent a bit of time – I spent high school and university in Vancouver. For every summer, I was either working as a geologist or in the Army – all over Canada. And I spent a couple years working in mining in Canada; I spent a

³² For French group members as well, the international self is an important part of self-understanding, even when ‘home.’ For example, Antoine, in his profile introduction on Expats Paris says: ‘I just love to travel and have fun, here in Paris or anywhere I go, and wanna meet the world *here* when I’m not traveling.’

year in Bosnia, peacekeeping with the Canadian Army. And then I spent two years in London – I did an MBA in London. And I did two years in Scotland with Total. And now two years in Paris.

Benjamin attended an international elementary school in Saudi Arabia and a ‘very Canadian’ high school in Canada. Because he considers *himself* a ‘hybrid,’ one of Benjamin’s favorite breaking-the-ice conversations is to discuss hybrid animals; thus as we walked to our interview location he told me about pumas and leopards making ‘pumapards’, about ‘grizzlars’, ‘ligers’, ‘whalfins’ (whale dolphins) and other examples of ‘hybrid taxonomy.’ He is flexible in conversation, adept at either discussing current world events or joking around – indeed, he seemed to have a toolbox of tactics for making light-hearted small-talk. It took quite a few run-ins at meet-up events before I was able to convince him to do an interview with me, and I was certain that he just enjoyed the banter involved in him saying ‘no’ and me making a pitch to convince him.

When we finally met for an interview, and through additional conversations at later events, I saw a person who very much demonstrates the slipperiness of the concept of ‘class’ in relation to social positioning in a field of mobile people. For example, I never saw him wearing anything other than a well-fitted business suit, yet he spoke of himself as a ‘middle class guy’ and compared himself to other people who had ‘their nice suits,’ or had started with many advantages that he hadn’t had as he embarked on his career. He did not make or spend ‘a lot’ of money personally, but his job – and the mobility, including ‘first class’ international flights – gave him an aura of ‘elite-ness’. One night at a meet-up he told me the following story, which I’ve excerpted from my Field-notes:

Benjamin said that after the previous week's Aperero, he was on the metro and he saw a guy harassing a girl, so he did what some Colonel in the Military Service had recommended – and he rolled up his Financial Times newspaper into a tight roll and jabbed the guy in the stomach with it! He said that you can't just hit 'em with the roll sideways because then it just bends and is not powerful, but that if you jab someone with it straight-on it's actually really strong. Anyway, he was being very dramatic about it all, and told the story as if he had been attacked...I pointed out that Benjamin actually seems to have been the attacker. But he said, "No, I was the good guy!" And I said, "How can you really say that for sure?" and he replied, "Because I was the guy in a suit."

Benjamin also positions himself in terms of quantifying international moving experiences, considering this as a measuring stick of great importance. For example, after our interview we joined some mutual meet-up friends at a nearby bar; here is the excerpt of the conversation, documented in my Field-notes:

Claire asked Benjamin how the interview went and he said it was fine. I mentioned that I also wanted to interview the colleague of his who was with him when I met them both at an apero. I asked if he knew if the colleague had returned from Moscow yet, because when I emailed him about the interview he responded that he would be glad to do it when he was back in town. Claire was curious about this colleague and asked about him; I responded that he and Benjamin were very different, which I meant as a compliment. Benjamin replied that he agreed with me that they were different and that it was because his colleague was 'really interesting'. I said: 'Don't you think you are interesting?' and he replied, 'Well, he's lived in a lot more

countries than me; he's lived all over. Well, Benjamin himself has lived in at least six countries, so this statement seemed slightly ridiculous to me, but perhaps telling of what counted as important to him (Field-notes, November 14, 2008).

Benjamin found out about the meet-ups when he first moved to Paris, two years ago, when he was “looking for some kind of tips or help or advice on how to deal with administrative stuff.” For awhile he tried the Canadian, American, and international groups, eventually settling into just attending the international events because they were bigger and he found the variety of people in attendance more ‘interesting’, and liked that he was less likely to get ‘stuck’ in a conversation. When he moves on from Paris – likely within the next year – he assumes he’ll be sent to Africa: Nigeria, Angola or the Congo. When I asked if he minded continually being on the move, he responded: “There’s a whole world out there...” and added later, “I could walk out the door and go to the airport and never come back to my apartment here, it wouldn’t really bother me.”

This idea of seeing the world as an open field to be explored is a large part of presenting the *international self*. This is again demonstrated in the following excerpt from my interview with Morten, a man from Sweden who uses Paris as a base for his work as an international telecommunications consultant:

M I have no intention of moving back to Sweden. That would feel like a step *back* somehow.

E So where do you think you will live in the future? Do you think you may be in Paris for awhile?

M I don’t want to live in one place like that. I mean, a couple of months a year here and there, and try new places.

E Any idea where? Some ideas?

M For me, Asia is quite blank for the moment. So that's where I would really like to spend more time. And South America.

And similarly, Anna, from Bulgaria, explains:

It's always the chance of discovering something new. I feel that if I stay in one place for too often I get used to everything, I know exactly what's gonna happen tomorrow. When I know exactly, then it gets boring, too monotonous. But when I visit a new country, I see new things, I see new lifestyles, new people, new languages...

And, Brandon, from France:

I'm a kind of citizen of the world. I'm not really attached to France – it's just like, wherever I feel good, I can stop *there* and just like *live* for another few years if I really like it.

These projects of the 'international self' do not only refer to having an ability to travel and live in many different places and cultures. They also entail the capacity for 'getting along' with people from a variety of backgrounds. For example, Victor, from Mexico, told me:

I think that I [have] found people from different places: Spanish, Lebanon, Brazil. For the point of view, everyone is *very* different, and I think that to get an agreement sometimes is a bit difficult but it's at the same time – how can I say – [it] *enriches* you. Because you manage situations [that] you're not habitué to do.

Is the 'International Self' a Sustainable Subjectivity?

Some people who have been living the mobile lifestyle for a long time express that they are tiring of it. They look around the international community and suddenly see something

different than that which originally attracted them. There can be a backlash against this idea of the rootless individual. This was particularly evident among women in their mid to late thirties. For example, here is Marion – a French woman who had lived for many years in Germany and Indonesia, as well as having frequent periods of extended travel:

I live like a Bohemian, you know, Gypsy, all the – most of my life. Through [our] family stories, it's the same thing – we don't have really a *base*. We go there, and there, and there, and there... and I need like, a *center*, before eventually – because I'm still a nomad and I'm a Bohemian soul – before eventually going *out* again. But I don't know if I would be as living like, living and staying in the country I'm working in, or – the best would be like being on [a] mission. Like having a headquarters and being six months or one year [there]. I want to go to India – I know I will be in India somehow, but I don't know how, what... I basically have this *world* thing, but at the moment, it's not the priority because my psyche and everything is not stabilized, and I really need it. I need to be rooted and settled a bit.

Something similar was expressed by Nashita, who I interviewed along with her partner Sajay – both are from India, and had spent many years living in the United States and France, as well as having extended trips in other countries as part of their careers:

N One thing that I feel is that when you're younger, you really want to get into this international scene and you want to travel and all of that. But as I've met a lot more people, you know, as part of this international life, I find that eventually everybody wants to put a root somewhere. And one thing that we share in common for sure [within their couple], is that we say, the day we retire we're going back to India. That's where we're retiring. So I think

eventually everybody has a root where they want to go back to. I don't know, for everybody it's a different place, but I think, even though you're 'international', you still have...

E Somewhere you have a 'local.'

S But that's becoming hard actually.

N It is. Because even if I were to go back to India, I can't really divorce myself from the West. I have to keep traveling. I think we'd live... Ideally it would be six months/six months – that would be super!

These two examples demonstrate how even those who expressed an interest in eventually curbing the frequency of their migration continued to see themselves as 'international' in terms of their worldviews.

Brubaker and Cooper point out that 'self-understanding,' while never purely cognitive, is a

subjective, auto-referential term. As such, it designates one's own understanding of who one is. It cannot capture others' understandings, even though external categorizations, identifications, and representations may be decisive in determining how one is regarded and treated by others, indeed in shaping one's own understanding of oneself. (p. 18)

At the same time, the 'self' also identifies with collectivities, and these can be multiple; they can be 'distinctive and bounded' or loose, or a combination. And of course, they involve the sense of exclusions, of an 'outside.' This is explored in the final part of the Brubaker and Cooper framework.

Commonality, Connectedness & Groupness: The ‘International Community’

According to Brubaker and Cooper, ‘Groupness’ is formed by a combination of the sharing of a common attribute with a sense of a relational tie linking people. For this reason, the websites become very important in that the ‘profile structure’ coupled with a calendar of offline events provides the *sense* that people are linked in a relationship. The discourse of the sites sets up the ‘common attribute.’ For example, Kunveno.com welcomes ‘*internationally-minded people*’ to join its weekly Happy Hour at a Paris bar, adding: “You can meet other international people and *feel at home*” (kunveno.com). These two terms – international and home – as typically understood, could be almost completely opposite in meaning. And, from the text, it would seem that just like the ‘international’ is a state of mind, so is ‘home.’ In fact, the websites for international people are full of references to a happy *homelessness*, and the *groupness* seems somewhat constituted by the idea that to belong to the group is to *not* belong anywhere, or perhaps in another way, *to belong anywhere*.

The Paris New in Town MeetUp’s ‘welcome’ message begins with a very informal message from the organizer. The informal tone and the multiplicity of members’ quotes in many locations present the group as being a close-knit community with relational links (even if, with almost 1000 members, it’s not very likely that everyone actually knows each other). While the connectedness is suggested to be strong, what the group *actual does* is presented in very loose terms, relying mostly on the commonality (new to Paris) to provide connectedness. For example, the ‘about us’ message has many attempts to provide both a structure, and a freedom to diverge from the structure. Use of the pronouns ‘I’ and ‘we’ and ‘you’ invite the site visitor to feel welcomed and included:

I would like to see this group discover new places in Paris together... Please send me your ideas and tell me what you would like to discover.

Edouard, Emmanuel and I will be posting a lot of events, but please don't ever feel pressure to go to everything! We want people to be relaxed, happy and open to new experiences when we are together... so, please only join the activities which interest you! We're very easy-going and just want everyone to have a good time! :-)
(<http://newintown.meetup.com/39/about/>).

The tone of the message sets up a rather carefree group of people – “relaxed, happy and open to new experiences” – and if that’s ‘you,’ you *should* feel welcome. Again, there is perhaps no room for the person who, having just arrived in town and not knowing anybody, may be feeling lonely, lost, or in despair.

In almost all of the sites, the commonality of the groups is a certain *mindset*, an orientation towards ‘global,’ ‘international,’ ‘diversity,’ and ‘open-mindedness,’ as well as a set of personality traits such as ‘interesting,’ ‘relaxed,’ and ‘fun.’ This set of characteristics is often encompassed by the overall term, ‘like-minded.’ For example, Horn’s Social Agenda says that, “We are a community of international, cosmopolitan and like-minded individuals who enjoy meeting and socializing with each other.” Many meet-up members use these terms of mindedness to talk about their commonalities with other, as of yet un-met, group members. For example, Alex, in his introduction to the New in Town Group, says: “Would love to meet new, international, open-minded people around the world!” And in an interview with Tobias, a Korean-German, he tells me:

T The first thing is that I like to meet new people even if I know already a lot of foreigners and friends, and secondly these events are always nice events to

chat with people, to have some drinks. Because I realize that often these people, at these meet-ups, they share a same – they have the same mind.

E And how do you mean?

T So, they have quite international backgrounds. That makes them often very open-minded, very worldly, and well, [it's] interesting to chat with these people... you have a lot of common points you can discuss.

Monique, from France, worked with social networking sites serving expats in Indonesia.

Below is her point of view on how a common mindset linked the group there:

M The young professionals make careers and they pay a price for that because you can't have everything. The price to pay is lonesome and disconnected and everything. It's the price for your career, so you are even more willing to have some fresh air and to meet other people who have *the same mentality*, who have the same problems, because the locals and the people you meet one-to-one, they don't have this problem. *They* are all somehow interconnected, integrated: they have their families or whatever, they speak the language, they understand how they feel, so, if there is one crowd who really is like *dying* for meeting people...

Clearly problematic is the question of how this common mindset may account for the *diversity* said to be found in an 'international' group and the respect for difference implied by the 'cosmopolitan' discourse of the websites. This is pointed out as problematic by Alice, who admits, "I think how much an international experience opens the mind of someone is a very variable question".

Bodies Among 'Common Minds'

While extensive talk about global- or like-mindedness provides the commonality in both web discourse and offline conversations, many other participants indicated that in many ways the meet-ups are just as much about putting *bodies* together as minds. For example, Monique, quoted above, continued her point in the following way:

M ...And they don't have so much time either because they are either studying like mad because it's an MBA or program where you need a lot of time for the language and things, or you're making [a] career or you have [a] high responsibilities job where you have NO TIME...

E So you need to be able to just show up at a party.

M Yeah. You don't have time to organize or to take care of your social life - *at all*.

Discussion about the need to be with other bodies – even if ‘like-minded ones’ – went beyond *being together* in public social space. Many women whom I interviewed complained they felt that a lot of the men at the meet-ups were attending in order to look for someone to ‘hook up with,’ rather than a more serious relationship or friendships. For example, Kata, from Cyprus, touches on this in our interview:

K Most of my experiences are positive. But I think – I think some guys are going there just to pick up girls.

E I think so too.

K It could be a good thing, but if a guy is there with a *different* girl every time, it is not good.

E I mean, if you happen to meet somebody and you get along and you go on a date, it's nice, but if you are there looking for a different girl every week...

K But I know some guys who are just liking ten different girls, so it is not very...it sounds a little bit...

E Desperate.

K Yeah.

I heard this repeatedly through interviews or meet-up conversations with women, and even experienced it myself – for example, mentioned in this excerpt from my notes after an International Events *Apero*:

It was hard to get away to mingle. Another Italian guy came over – the physics professor – and it was really a pick-up scene, only too many men fighting for Claire's and my attention. I wanted to mingle but I felt like the guys had monopolized me – it was hard to know how to get away (Field-notes, September 18, 2008).

Also important is how the discourse on mindedness likely acts as a code for *which* bodies are acceptable in the groups. For example, can unprivileged migrants that cross borders and forge their way in foreign lands be considered 'global minds'? At Kunveno.com, the following categories are used to define the 'internationally minded' group:

Membership is free of charge and open to all who define themselves as "internationally-minded": expatriates, international managers, returning expatriates, adult TCKs (Third Culture Kids), world citizens, global nomads, cultural cosmopolitans and nationals who share our enthusiasm for intercultural exchange (kunveno.com).

While even French ‘nationals’ are included in this invitation, certain groups are conspicuously missing from the list: immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers – people for whom intercultural exchange may have been either selected or forced, but has in any case been negotiated through circumstances experienced perhaps just as much bodily as ‘minded.’³³

As Brubaker and Cooper suggest, looking at identity through ‘identification and categorization,’ ‘self-understanding and social location,’ and ‘commonality, connectedness, groupness’ begins to demonstrate the ‘linking and separating’ that goes on in the ‘international community’ so that we can begin to see connections forged among the like-minded, while hierarchies of differences crystallize at levels within and outside of ‘the community’.

Exclusions: Boundaries of the ‘Borderless’

As Fechter (2007) points out, the rhetoric of ‘flows’ that is so often attached to mobility in discussions of globalization does not pay enough attention to the importance of boundaries in mobile peoples’ lives. For the borderless, certain boundaries become key. While there is an importance attached to points of view in terms of certain ‘mindedness’ (open-, global-, etc.), there is a dearth of discussion about the more specific, embodied experiences of globality on these sites. Signs and codes (such as languages and experiences) are important to map global pedigrees, but specific discussions about the emotional and physical stresses involved in attaining and maintaining such lifestyles are avoided (online, at any rate, and in the cocktail-level conversation at many meet-ups).

³³ Particularly in light of ‘detention centers’ in Europe where un-documented migrants are sent while their cases are processed (often for years): Places which have been accused of massive overcrowding, underfeeding, as well as being breeding-grounds for rape, murder and other bodily crimes.

Thus, in some sense, the exclusions are voluntary – if one senses that one’s ‘I’ can easily attach to the presented ‘We,’ then “Welcome!” Online, among those who fit the bill for membership in ‘the international community,’ there are hierarchies within the group, as suggested by the performances of global pedigrees and mindsets stressing the ‘carefree’ and ‘relaxed’ character of members’ profiles.

Interestingly, on the InterNations forum a debate did arise about what makes a ‘global mind,’ specifically in relation to whom should be invited into the community (e.g. should the site organizers try to come up with a definition of ‘global mind’ and be more picky as to who they ‘let in.’) The originator of the post claimed that she was ambivalent about inviting more people until the issue had been resolved because she had been so disappointed about some of the forum posts that she felt showed a lack of tolerance, a tendency to use over-generalizations (e.g. “all Americans are...”), and too many “black and white judgments.” She continued on to pose questions to the group about what it is that makes a global mind, and pointed out that, in her opinion, *everybody* would *claim* to be one:

Being asked, would not everyone just say he/she is one? Who would say “Oh God forbid, I am not. I am a local....” – yes, what? Redneck? Opposer of globalization? Believer that the world is still flat?

(internations.org/forum/forumpost/&threat_id=1368).

With the question posed as such, it is clear that from the poster’s point of view, ‘locals,’ ‘rednecks,’ and those opposed to globalization (a global and highly cosmopolitan movement) would be excluded from the community of global minds. That said, while some people tried to answer her question directly, others took her to task for the way she had posed it, and a

debate raged on the subject (with many sticking up for ‘locals,’ although nobody defended ‘rednecks.’)

Also, while the stated ethic in the groups is of diversity and open-mindedness, there is also a tendency that echoes Robbins’ (1994) critique of ‘cosmopolitanism’ wherein agents or participants who are non-Western see their cosmopolitanism used as an ‘arrival’ at modernity – a successful gaining of acceptance upon arrival from the colonies to the ‘developed’ West. For example, the following experience is noted in my Field-notes from an evening when I took Alaine – a meet-up member and interview participant from Cameroon – with me to an event because he was somewhat nervous to go alone:

When I was eating with Alaine, Marco came to say Hello and introduce himself to Alaine. I jokingly told him I was trying to make the group more international by bringing someone from outside of Europe (I remembered from our interview that Marco had said that he would really like to get more people from underrepresented countries – in Africa and South America – to come to the parties). Marco was like “yeah, great! Welcome!!” And then he mentioned that he thought there might be some other people from Cameroon at the party. Alaine looked excited and said “oh, really!?” and Marco said “yeah, just look around – there are basically like only three other black people here, and one is short, one is medium, and one is tall, so they should be easy to find.” That’s the kind of thing that would be kind of weird to say in the US – and I’m not sure if it bothered Alaine or was taken as straight-up information, which is how Marco seemed to intend it. Anyway, the “tall one” must have been Elise (although she’s actually from Senegal). When she walked by I tried to introduce them. Alaine looked happy to meet her but she was courteous yet very brief

with him. She said “hi, nice to meet you” and kept moving; basically shook his hand and moved on. Still, he seemed happy to meet her even if the feeling was not exactly mutual. I’ve noticed she tends to hang mainly with the Italians and French people (Field-notes, October 16, 2009).

My interpretation of the interaction between Elise and Alaine was that Alaine was interested in meeting other Africans (he told me that a large part of his friend-circle is made up of other Africans, even if not all Cameroonians, and he also said he is a subscriber and avid reader of the weekly journal *Jeune Afrique* – with concentrates on issues in Africa and among members of the African Diaspora) – and his main interest in participating in the meet-ups was to practice English in hopes of advancing his career. At the same time, I had noted that the normally friendly and outgoing Elise – whom I had met and spoke with at many meet-ups – seemed specifically interested in pursuing a social circle that *did not* include Africans. In fact, she was well known among Italian (having lived in Rome previously, she spoke Italian) and French members, as well as people from other ‘Western’ backgrounds. As her Senegalese siblings also live in Paris, she certainly has contact with people from her native country, yet Elise did not strike me as interested in taking advantage of the opportunity to meet all meet-up attendees but rather mostly focused on the European and to a lesser extent the North American members.

Otherwise, boundaries (both internal and external to the group) seemed to exist in areas that have been previously mentioned: between the international community and the ‘locals’ (Parisian and otherwise); between the ‘open-minded’ and those perceived to be ‘closed’-minded; between ‘international people’ and ‘tourists;’ and, as Alice suggested, perhaps also between the liberal majority and a conservative minority (although many

members would be considered ‘financial conservatives,’ it was still the norm to portray a certain politically and socially liberal mindset).

Although I argued in Chapter Four that people at the international meet-ups should *not* be monolithically referred to as ‘elites,’ it’s also true that the group has a type of ‘elite’ character, made up of the experiences and types of global-mindedness mentioned above, rather than necessarily *material* circumstances. Thus one of the most important divisions between the group and ‘others’ seems to be around this concept of social class, even while it may not be based on traditional notions of class. Commenting on the diversity of the new mobile professionals noted during her ethnographic study, Fechter points out that “if such a globally mobile generation, or class, materialized, where belonging was not predicated on possessing Euro-American nationality but rather on professional status, this would also mean that boundaries of ethnicity or race would be reconfigured, and partly overcome, by boundaries of class” (2007:166).

Indeed, an experience at an International Events meet-up on a riverboat illustrated to me very clearly that I could somehow recognize the group *as a group*, a recognition that seemed to have social class outlines. The following excerpt from my Field-notes demonstrates how I came to see that the meet-up groups *do* have a certain type of elite-ness about them:

Last night I went to the ‘International Events in Paris’ party on a boat (‘peniche’) on the Seine. It sounded fun – there was to be a food buffet for members in a separate area reserved for the group for the first couple of hours, after which that area would open up to the general public just like the rest of the boat for the rest of the night. The event was advertised as a dance party that could go into the wee hours, with one floor

of the boat dedicated to 80s music, one floor of 90s music. I went with a friend and Claire met us later.

We got there early and there were not yet many people. Marco, the host (one of the four founders/leaders of the group), met us at the door and welcomed us gregariously. He gave us blue plastic bracelets and told us that there was another party in the same room but that they were the people with RED bracelets, and that if we look around we will find the other people with BLUE bracelets and should introduce ourselves.

Okay, weird, but must have patience. Look around. Who's here? First, the room wasn't nearly as charming as the bars of the 'Aperos'. It was a pretty bare space...had the feeling of a floating VFW or Elks Club community events room, like the kind of place we had to decorate for our prom in rural Wyoming. Bare walls, bad lighting, a few low tables and chairs that looked as if stolen from a hotel lobby, and a plain, ad-hoc bar where the bartender seemed to have shown up with a cooler of beers, a couple bottles of wine, some liters of mixers and bottles of liquor, and his own set of plastic cups and cooler of ice.

The people were a really different crowd from the Aperos the week before. In fact, the crowd didn't seem to cohere or look like a group of any kind - whereas at the party before there had been a sort of unity to the look and the feel of the group, even though most people didn't know each other. I found myself looking around and thinking, "Who are these people?" It didn't look like a particularly French crowd, or at least not like I'd seen at any other place that I'd gone out in Paris. Yet it also didn't look like the international crowd, like at the other events organized by the

groups online. It actually probably was an international mix, but why did it seem so odd?

It was too diverse!!

As much as the international groups claim diversity, the boat had many non-white people compared to other events – as well as what seemed to be a very wide range of social class positions suggested by the clothing worn. It was perhaps much more close to the meaning of ‘diverse’ that the meet-up groups claim to have, but it looked ‘off’ in terms of what I had come to see as the ‘look’ of the crowd at the international events.

Eventually, Marco went into overdrive trying to get all his Blue Bracelet people together, but before that my friend and I tried to speak to people on our own. It just wasn’t happening. No one would even make eye contact, let alone seem open to conversation when we made efforts – so different from the ‘lets all meet each other’ vibe of the Aperol. But then, suddenly we realized we were in a No Bracelet area – not even a Red Bracelets area (whoever ‘they’ were)!!

It was a bit chilly so people were wearing coats, and it made it more difficult to notice the bracelets. Clearly the people, wherever they had been recruited from to come to the party (perhaps their hotels? There was a definite tourist segment to the make up, especially of the early crowd), had not been in on the fact that the game was about meeting people. They were in small groups or couples – and most looked dreadfully bored and uncomfortable (as was I!) If only they knew they could have been meeting people – would it have made any difference? We tried to join one table with an Indian man sitting alone. He had no bracelet but we didn’t notice at first. But

anyway, he told us that his group was at the buffet and would be coming back. He was not open to conversation at all. Okay, we kind of backed away from the ‘no bracelet crowd’ and made our way towards the bar, where Marco was putting blue bracelets on new arrivals and trying to match them up in conversations.

My friend kept making comments about the freakiness of the whole situation, saying it gave him the creeps. But I insisted we stay awhile, to see what would happen, how it would develop. Eventually most of the Blue Bracelet ‘international people’ congregated on the upper level of the boat (someone said it’s because you could smoke up there, and that “the internationals are the smokers”) and up there the crowd did actually start to have the “look” – the coherence that it lacked downstairs (Field-notes, September 14, 2009).

The ‘blue bracelet’ situation was the first time I felt that the international meet-ups had a sort of ‘exclusivity’ to them. As previously mentioned, the bar events are free to attend (although this riverboat party did have a ‘cover charge,’ which was unusual). And even if the ‘bracelet plan’ was not likely used by the organizers to create a feeling of exclusivity³⁴, the experience still illuminated a certain exclusive characteristic of the group.

Problems with exclusivity: A Small World. Another international social networking group I joined *does* intend to create exclusivity; in fact, that is how ‘A Small World’ brands itself. Their homepage reads: “ASMALLWORLD is a private international community of culturally influential people who are connected by three degrees” (asmallworld.net). This group works much like InterNations in that it combines online forums and offline events,

³⁴ Marco said that this way, people could find each other and it would be easier to start conversation, but I also later learned that the organizers were compensated monetarily in relation to the amount of people they had been able to attract to the boat party (put on by a radio station, apparently) and the colored bracelets were a way of keeping a head-count.

with members participating from around the world, only it can be quite difficult to join. One cannot simply join because one wants; instead an invitation is required. And this invitation cannot be from *just anybody* but must be from a ‘trusted member’ (someone whose ‘quality’ of connections has been vetted and eventually approved by the organizers). Of the many people I met who were members of Small World, only one had ‘invite privileges.’

Small World was not originally part of my study because I was at first unable to gain access. However, through my participation in the Paris meet-ups, I eventually met the ‘right person’ who was able to invite me. While I’ve heard it said that the group has its advantages, and is ‘more active’ in New York and other cities, in Paris it was not nearly as successful as the open-invitation meet-ups in terms of organizing events. According to some interviewees, many Small World events are actually planned by inviting personal lists of ‘friends’, rather than opening them up to the general membership (which provides an extra layer of exclusion since the general membership is supposedly already a group of ‘approved people’). Yet, on many occasions, at meet-ups and in interviews, people *used* the fact that they were ‘on Small World’ as symbolic capital and to see if such capital was shared by others in the group. It was quite common to hear “Are you on Small World?” at an international meet-up event, even if it was used much more as a status symbol than as a *creator* of social venues.

The ‘Small World experience’ in Paris indicated to me that a *key* part of creating a successful offline community from an online base is *inclusivity*, or openness. As mentioned previously, this does not indicate that there are not certain hierarchies or other types of controls at play in the groups, but in accordance with the flexible and diverse nature of the international community, if a group is too tightly ‘closed,’ it does not thrive in the same way as open-invitation venues like the meet-ups. And as Tobias, from Germany, told me:

Meetup.com and Small World are both quite extreme. So, meet-up, *everybody's* invited: different age, different background. But Small World is like small, glamorous – wealthy, rich, beautiful people for example. So it's a little... sometimes it's quite nice to go to a meet-up and meet some *real* expat people from a totally different background. And Small World is focused on this...it's okay, but it's funny to belong to it. It's not *non-plus-ultra*. That's a word in English?

Benjamin, discussed earlier, was one of the many frequent meet-up participants who belonged to Small World but claimed not to utilize it. In fact, he laughed at its pretensions, saying:

99% of the people on Small World are German and Italian managing directors of banks, or princes, counts, presidents of companies. I mean it's, it's either a *complete lie* or... And well, they let *me* in so, I mean, how 'elite' could it be? I've never been to any events, and I very rarely meet people that [have]. I mean, I know a few people that are on it, that have a lot of 'friends', and sometimes they'll send me a message through Small World and I'll get it three months later and be like, "oh, great, I was invited to a party."

It seems the 'elite-ness' and exclusivity of Small World works as an attempt to draw advertisers to a particular market-type more than to create an actual community. For example, while the meet-up websites have very small advertisements toward the bottom of the page – for services such as finding a bank in a foreign city, or finding local accommodations, Small World goes for a higher end 'market', selling its members' 'exclusive' demographics to advertisers such as the champagne Moët & Chandon or the 'fine jewelry' of Van Cleef and Arpels (advertisements which are prominently displayed at the top

of the page). Small World demonstrates what theorists such as Machin and van Leeuwen (2008) and Nealon (2006) have pointed out, which is that in many cases today, particularly online, creating *collective identities* is also about creating niche markets that encourage a ‘branding of the self’ (Machin & van Leeuwen 2008); and the narrow-orientation of such markets is in itself an exclusion to community.

How to Build Community: Challenges from an Organizing Perspective

In addition to noting group commonalities and exclusions, I was very interested in understanding of what kinds of behind the scenes ‘work’ went into creating ‘groupness.’ In this vein, my interviews with three group organizers in Paris were very informative. These interviews, combined with stories about ‘challenges to community’ discussed by members, and those noted through my own participatory experiences, provide insights into the continued importance of *people* in a technologically-seeded social realm, as well as into the problems that communities – particularly ‘temporary’ communities of this type – face in an age of individualism and mobility.

First, while the constituents of the international meet-ups are usually very mobile people, staying in Paris for short periods of time – anywhere from 2 weeks to 3 years – the group organizers tend to be longer-term expatriate residents. For example, Marco from International Events had been in Paris eight years; and the two organizers interviewed from Expats Paris had been in the city for five and eight years, respectively. In all of the cases, they founded or got involved in the groups because of the isolation they themselves had felt when first moving to France, and to help others in the same situation. Marco’s first experience living abroad was in London, working in ‘hospitality’, at a time when not only

were there no Internet-based offline social groups, there was no Internet. He spoke about the loneliness he felt, and how he had the sense that he was far from home and that there was nobody who would help him. His second time living abroad was a more structured experience – a three-month job with Disneyland Paris doing ‘guest relations’. According to Marco:

Then it was a totally different experience. Different from *now*, but different from the beginning [in London] as well. It was a fun atmosphere with a lot of people from different countries, having fun. I mean, the first time, I didn’t have enough money to eat. And I was sleeping more or less three, four hours a night, and working fourteen. I didn’t have any friends. Second time, I was in Disneyland with a lot of people and all nationality living together – a very nice atmosphere... Of my first experience, I was an immigrant. And now I’m an expat.

After Disneyland Paris, Marco spent a mandatory year in military service in Italy, and then took a year and a half job working on a cruise ship, after which he decided to move back to Paris and start his own company. At that time, he decided to try to start a group for people in his same situation. This is how he described the decision and the process in our interview:

One of the problem when you are searching a job, or when you are arriving in a new country is you don’t know anybody, you don’t have any connection, and for example, when I was in England in the beginning, I didn’t know anybody, I didn’t know how to work outside, what we could do... and I was knowing just from colleagues, and especially if you work in a restaurant you are between ten persons but you don’t know anybody else. It’s difficult to go in a bar and find new people, new friends. And moreover, for suggestions for how to live in the country.

Second thing, for example, when you are here and you are searching for a job, or even if you are doing a master. For example, a lot of people in France – and this is different from the States or England – they come with the diploma, with the degree after they go out of the school... but they rely on *connections* to get jobs. And you can arrive *with the same degree* and you don't have connections – makes a problem. And then I say, “we should do some community things for expats or international people or various nationalities where people can meet, have friendship... for example, people can arrive to the drink, meet twenty people easily, even if they work in a small company without other colleagues of their ages... they arrive to the drink, they know ten people, and they probably met at least one person who is quite friendly or is quite nice for them, and that's a good way to start a life in a country – meeting people.”

He purposely built the group to be ‘international’ – rather than say, trying to meet just the other Italians in Paris – because he thought it would help everyone feel more integrated in the city. And secondly, he thought that would improve peoples' chances for networking. He also noted that a group was important because if an expat simply made friends on their own, chances are those friends would leave Paris after a year or two; and you could be left once again with no friends. He points out that although the turnover is high in the group, the atmosphere remains the same:

With this kind of group, you arrive, even after two years, most part of the group has changed but people find the same atmosphere of the Paris you knew, or even another city you knew. With this kind of group you don't feel like “I've been to a strange city who forgot me.” And that's another reason why we do it... We often say, for

example, we have 30% of people coming time to time – for example, once every month or because they are traveling when they are in Paris. Often [there] are people who are coming because they have a headquarter in Paris but they don't live in Paris. Every time they come, they come to our parties to feel *in* the city. You know, when you travel around in another city – you can go every week to London for [your] job and you never feel at home because you don't know anybody – you just go there for job, for work. And they feel different [in Paris] because they come to our parties and they feel like they know people in Paris.

At the same time, many years of organizing is beginning to take its toll. Marco and his co-organizers get tired, and wish there were more commitment from other expatriates to help carry some of the load. He told me that over the years he had seen many successful groups come and go because the organizer moved, got married, got tired and quit, etc. He said that in these cases, one of two things happened: either the organizer found it too “difficult to give his baby to somebody else,” or, although many people said they were interested in taking over, nobody stepped up to the plate to do so, and “the things died.”

Marco and his partners are facing such a crossroads with International Events. As he points out, it's a lot of work and they do it every week. The ‘work’ is not only in the organizational aspect – making and keeping good relations with the bars and clubs, planning the dates, promoting events, etc. – but also during the events themselves, where they work hard to keep people happy and feeling connected. For example, Marco points out that:

Sometimes I feel tired about the parties because I can't really be making friendships because I'm always speaking with *everybody*... I feel like the duty to go and speak with everybody because everybody has to be welcome.

I had noticed this about Marco even before our interview, and my Field-notes are replete with references to him running around, putting people into conversations and making them feel welcome. At one particular *Apero* I noted how important this was to making the entire project work:

I arrived earlier than usual and there were only a small scattering of people at the bar so far. Marco wasn't there yet, and new arrivals looked really lost. Three separate people came in alone, got drinks, and sat down on the long sofa/benches that stretched around the room. Each was sitting just a couple feet from the other, but looking straight ahead nervously, not speaking or making eye contact with each other. I felt so sorry for them, I was considering going over to introduce myself and start conversation but realized that in my role as ethnographer it would be better to observe rather than participate in this instance. I was rewarded with a good scene: Marco arrives, looking tired and harried... he sees the people sitting alone and immediately springs into action...going up to them, saying "HELLO!!" and "Welcome!!" with a lot of energy, and trying to introduce them to each other and others around, trying to pull them all into conversation. Watching him it was clear that he is important as a 'hub' – not just a person who gathers the contacts through the meet-up web-page but also as a personality, a character. He keeps it alive. But at the same time, it's like he's always trying to make people become independent from him, by introducing them to others and getting them into their own conversations before running off. (Field-notes, September 18, 2008).

Marco and his partners have thought many times about ceasing to be the organizers of the group, citing extreme exhaustion and a desire to pursue new interests. On the other hand,

if they continue, he wants to figure out how to make a lasting community of the endeavor, something that can ‘outlive’ them. It’s a challenge that these organizations rely so much on the organizers, says Marco, and not a challenge that many people are willing to take up: “Today, why should you organize a group? You can go to plenty of groups without organizing.”

Citing the local/global organization Rotary International as a role model, Marco says he would like to create something similar, where people would feel committed to the group for life, no matter where they lived. However, Marco believes what community researchers such as Willson (2006) have also pointed out, which is that a lack of commitment combined with too many choices makes it so that people don’t have attachment to any one community in particular anymore. On the other hand, he believes these online-to-offline groups will become increasingly important in coming years, as increased migration away from friends and family, along with increased time spent online will make people more hungry for contact. At the same time, a lack of commitment to any one community is, from his point of view, a characteristic of the international lifestyle:

The thing is, you have too much choice, and in the end you are *more* lonely than before. You change every time but you don’t have a *community* of friends.

Stories from other interview participants and another co-organizer corroborated that the main problem with trying to create an international community through the meet-ups is this issue of a lack of commitment. According to Christina, a European co-organizer of Expats Paris, this is why the larger cocktail parties at bars are so much easier to arrange, because in such situations the organizer is not counting on RSVPs. She spoke to me of the

difficulties of trying to plan smaller events – such as dinner parties – that might actually lead to more personal conversations:

You know, I started to wonder if some people existed after awhile because I'm thinking like, this person keeps signing up and then never comes along... What's very interesting to me and what's actually quite disappointing is that people are... well for example, I'll organize something and I'll have all these people signing up and it will be like for example, dinner reservations, and I'll say to someone, "Okay, we're booking a table for everyone who's confirmed. So if you can't make it, *please* let me know, so that I can either let someone else come along, because the event is full, or I can change the reservation." And you know, no matter how many times you ask them, no matter how many times you've checked with them to say, "Look, this is really important, I'm making this reservation..." because in certain cases, we could have to foot the bill for them, you know, so that's difficult because sometimes we negotiate prices and associate the number of people coming along. And so if they don't come along, you know you could be left owing some money. And if you're a new organizer, you could make that mistake. However, I don't do that. For every dinner I organize now, I always book for fifteen people, and I always allow twenty to sign up... People – they don't come. *And* that's twenty people who I have emailed – not even just signing up – following up saying "Are you definitely coming to this event?" and they replied, saying, "Absolutely, I'll definitely be there." And they don't come! I find that infuriating.

And for new organizers, that's the thing that really gets them – they just can't stand that. But for me, now that I know all that happens, I just accept it. I just

organize and that's it. I saw one of the guys who started a new 'dining out' meet-up, he says to me, "I'm so annoyed... I booked this lunch the other day for fifteen people, and only eight people showed up." And I said, "That's normal. You have to accept that unfortunately." And he said, "No, but it's so rude, I'm gonna tell them to send me a check in the future" you know, for the event. And I'm like, that won't happen. You cannot ask them to do that. They won't do it... they won't send you a check. And he said, "Why not? Why can't they send me a..." And I said, "Look, they won't do it, okay? People will not do that." Too much, you know, too much commitment to something that you don't perhaps really know if you actually [want to] do yet...

Phoebe had said something similar about one of her friends who tried to start a meet-up that was based on more on doing *activities* rather than just drinking in pubs. In fact, one of her motivations had come from the fact that so many people said that *that's* the kind of meet-up they were really looking for. According to Phoebe, the friend eventually gave up:

The reason she stopped doing it was because she said that people might join up... people join up and say "Ahh, I want to do this, this and this..." She found that people *didn't*. So she would go through *a lot* of research to do museum events or cultural events, and she wouldn't get anybody turning up. So she got quite pissed off ... and we did one like a picnic in the park, when they did jazz in the summer, and she did it two or three weeks running, and I organized it one week as well, because she couldn't do it. We got two people who [made] it; *nobody* turned up *at all* one of the weeks that she did it, and she just said, "You know what? I can't do this anymore." She said, "People just want to go to bars, and get drunk, and pick up

people...” she went, “That’s fine!” She went, “But I tried to organize a group that’s doing things, but this branch, they’re not interested.”

Phoebe and I talked about the fact that although people may express a desire to do dinners, museum trips and other things in more intimate venues, the drop-in cocktail party at a bar fits very well with the lack of commitment and flexibility that most people seem to prefer. As Phoebe said, “At dinners, you’re definitely stuck there.”

This issue didn’t seem to bother the founder of Expats Paris, but on the other hand, he mostly dealt with the large pub venues, while his team of co-organizers specialized in organizing the smaller events. And in fact, from the very beginning, his experience had been different, as his goal had never been to become an organizer of a large, close-knit community of expats. David moved to Paris with his family five years ago to take a job with a French company, and finding that his colleagues were not the type to socialize with each other after work, he realized he needed to find other ways to make a community. He began by inviting a small group – perhaps ten or so – of other foreigners that he had met in various situations since his arrival, to meet up once a month for pizza and beer. From friends telling friends, the group began to grow. Eventually he learned about the meet-up.com website, and realized it would be the perfect ‘home’ for the budding community. Things grew from there, and now Expats Paris is the largest of all meet-ups in France.

When he first began to consider putting his group onto meetup.com, the site did not have the flexibility to make a group for an ‘international mix’ of people. As David explained: MeetUp didn’t have any ‘general expat’ group, and at the time, you couldn’t create your *own* MeetUp group – now you can create pretty much whatever you want. So at the time they just had these ‘categories’. So I wrote to them and I asked them to

change that – I asked them to add a category. And they didn't want to because when they created a category then – the way it worked then – it would automatically exist in all the 600 or so [at the time] meet-up cities. So they thought, 'no, people seem to like this Expat American, Expat German thing', so they didn't want to do that. I eventually convinced them to do it, and started the group, and very quickly these groups started opening up elsewhere around the world.

And so I saw this idea of mine kind of flourish on meet-up, and in unexpected places. The first one I noticed popped up, that seemed to have critical mass, and I have no idea where it is right now, was an Expat Group in Istanbul that started growing. I don't know if there's something particular about the expat experience in that city that, maybe it's that there isn't enough of a critical mass of national groups or, I don't know what it is...

There was a point where the founder and CEO of MeetUp – a guy named Scott Heiferman – was here in Paris on business. And so he took a bunch of us out to dinner. He took about fifteen of us who organize different groups out to dinner, and talked to us about how it all works. And that's kind of one of the things that we were talking about – about the *flexibility* of it – and how we wanted to be able to do whatever we wanted and so forth.

It's clear that organizers face a paradox. Participants seek a flexible venue and loose commitment combined with a consistent presence of a group wherein they may drop in as needed and feel connected. For example, Khaled, from Lebanon, is a frequent user of a wide variety of meet-ups. He told me that he enjoys meeting and getting to know different types of people but does not attend any one meet-up too regularly. He says that in many ways he is

against communities because they are too constricting: “I don’t like communities. I like to integrate, I like to know people around me, I like to live in the city... I don’t like the community-oriented lifestyle.”

He said it was mostly the feeling of being owned by one single community that repelled him, claiming that he was much more comfortable belonging to a range of communities: “You can have interests – similar interests – with a group of people, okay; *and another interest with another group.*”

The organizers of the Paris meet-ups worked very hard to manage the nuanced and conflicting expectations regarding community and flexibility. One thing was clear: groups that had a *team* of co-organizers were more successful – in terms of drawing large crowds – than those with a single organizer, resulting from the need to share the burden of managing administrative, communications, and organizational tasks, not to mention actually hosting at the events themselves. Also, when a single organizer attempted to run a group, the risk was that the group took on too much of an authoritarian feel wherein an attempt to too tightly define/control the collective groupness was constricting and eventually cut off the ability of the group to evolve. For example, Nick – who was introduced earlier in the chapter – said that in his opinion, nothing currently available for foreigners in Paris could compete with an older group called Expat Contact, a project originally started by an American man who had attended business school in Paris. This project was different from the current meet-ups in that it had an annual fee, and was apparently very closely controlled by the organizer. For example, to ensure it had a good ‘international balance,’ the organizer had set quotas as to the nationality make-up of the group. Nick insisted that there was also a balance in terms of social class, so that members ranged from ‘teachers to bankers to artists to scientists.’

In Nick's opinion, however, the group eventually broke down because of competing visions between the organizer and members. For example, the founder wanted to have a strong philanthropic component, as well as a job board where people would post new jobs from their companies that perhaps weren't officially announced anywhere else yet; whereas he felt the participants themselves mostly just wanted a portal to *social* events – parties and other 'get-togethers'. Members also began to complain about the extent to which he managed membership, feeling it was too much according to his own whims about who was accepted and what the right 'balance' may be. Infighting continued, and the organizer eventually ended the group, which is now completely defunct.

Another problem with single-organizer groups was that, even in the absence of an *authoritarian* leader, such groups could become too much *about the organizer*. This problem seemed to plague the International Nomad Community, whose enigmatic leader was the social core of the group, not simply a facilitator who tried to connect others. While many people sign up initially, this group had quite low attendance at events. These are notes recorded from the event that I attended, at which there were three people, including the organizer, with a fourth showing up at the end:

Jonathan made a comment comparing his attempts to build community with the kinds of people who “just twitter around to social events like butterflies” dropping in and out. I had the feeling that he was referring to something like the International Events cocktails where you can just show up to a crowd, work it or soak it up, and then leave. We talked about how people keep saying they are “looking for a community” without realizing they have to help build it (or maintain it). Just like with the interview with Marco, this conversation seemed to support what I have read in the

literature on community in the Internet age – lack of commitment, while more choice. The other guy there also has his own meet-up group, and as we talked about it, he said things like, “In my meet-up group...” and so even though he is the most regular attendee at INC (attending every time), it’s clear he sees it as Jonathan’s meet-up group, and not a collectively built endeavor. Jonathan would say, nonchalantly, things about “this meet-up” – like that he “wants people to come to this meet-up if they wanted and no big deal if they didn’t show up” but even within his casual words it was clear that it was his responsibility, his group. (Field-notes, October 11, 2008).

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, I asked if people in the Paris international meet-up community had discontinued their links to a nationality or a homeland identity, and if so, what new self and collective identities were they creating in place of the old. The answer to these questions indicates complex changes to attachments, lifestyles, and communities in relation to globalization processes, accompanying increases in professional (and continuous) migration, and the use of new communications technologies. In general – although this did not apply to everybody – people maintained a sense of nationality, even when taking on ‘global’ worldviews and identifying themselves as belonging to the groups of ‘international people.’ However, it was also noted that part of belonging to the international community was being able to demonstrate a range of Experiential identifications that added routes onto roots, as well as more symbolically mapping routes through performances of language capabilities.

Using Critical Discourse Analytic techniques to study the websites, I traced how the

organizer-produced ‘about us’ text, in conjunction with the content of template questions and the conglomerated responses of previous members in their own profiles, invited certain categorical identifications by new members – even as the open-ended response format of the meet-up.com sites allowed them to categorize themselves. This suggests that despite the creativity and democratic interactivity that is said to accompany Web 2.0, belonging is not just a matter of “Who am I?” but as Warde (1996) said, of asking “Who are *we*?” At the same time, set against the pre-determined drop-down format of InterNations and Horn’s Club websites, the open-ended format of Meet-up proved to be very important for a group of people for whom origins and nationality may be problematic concepts.

Attaching to the international meet-up community appeared as a strategic act for meeting Functional identification needs as much as it was based on any type of ‘new identity.’ As discussed in Chapter Three, many people originally arrive in Paris with dreams of becoming part of the local scene, and the loneliness that comes with the realization that in many cases that scene is closed drives them to seek out other options. Some people simply go to meet-ups a few times, and then, after meeting a small group of people, they are able to branch out on their own and no longer utilize the meet-ups for social events. Others, recognizing the transience of the international community, decide they need to keep an ongoing relationship to the meet-ups so that their social network can be continually refreshed. Even those who have built up a large network of friends through the meet-ups continue to use the venues for managing their social lives, liking the low commitment. For example, as Nick said to me in our interview:

N I liked that they had these drinks, aperos, every week. It’d be like Tuesday or Wednesday or Thursday, but changed it around a little bit. But so, you’d

always know that there was *something*. Because my schedule at the law firm was very unpredictable, sometimes I'd have to work all night, you know... and I wouldn't really know in advance. So I couldn't... it's hard to like, plan a dinner – like, “hey, let's have dinner on Wednesday night.” Because I would never know. But so, with this, you could – if you finished work early then you could, “Okay, so there's this thing, they're having drinks. I can go there.” And sometimes I'd go there like, eleven o'clock...

E And there would still be people there?

N Yeah. Sometimes I'd finish early and I'd go there at 8 or 9.

E But it is nice to know it's gonna happen whether or not you confirm...

N Yeah.

This inability or lack of desire to 'commit' to events, while convenient for participants makes building community a difficult task for organizers, and is something they struggle with constantly. Yet by building websites that use discourse and an archive of members to create a sense of an ongoing and dynamic community of people with certain commonalities (bi- or multi-lingual, have lived abroad, open- or globally-minded, and with an ethic of mobility – e.g. open-ended plans for the future), organizers are able to produce a space of continuity, even as the participants change. As Marco, the organizer of International Events said, “With this kind of group, you arrive, even after two years, most part of the group has changed but people find the same atmosphere of the Paris you knew, *or even another city you knew*.” The idea is that, globally migrating professionals have a certain look, attitude, collection of experiences, and worldviews that create an ambience of continuity anywhere in the world. Of course, this reliance on like-mindedness conflicts with the groups' stated ethic

of openness to all cultures and betrays the Western and Euro-centric orientation of the ‘international people’, an issue that will be discussed further in the concluding chapter.

While clearly exclusions emerged both inside and outside of the groups, and group organizers faced many challenges to building and maintaining the organizations that would allow ‘groupness’ to occur, it was clear that the main commonality running through the international meet-ups and establishing their groupness was that they met a functional need for globally migrating professionals and other privileged migrants in Paris: to feel *connected*. This function was simply summed up in an interview I had with Kata:

K: When I first came, I was quite lonely. I had a few friends but I didn’t feel connected. After I started the international meet-ups, I felt more connected. I met more people. Because if you go to a pub and stuff, it’s not easy to meet people like that. I think to meet people anyway is not so easy in Paris, but this is a good way to meet people.

E Okay, but what are you connected *to*?

K I think because we see people that are mostly having the same – they are most expats, they are most internationals – they have something *in common*... I think *that’s* what brings people together.

Even the new categorical mode of belonging – ‘international people’ – emerged as less than a *new identity* than as a means to an end, a route to joining a collective that would provide comfort and contact in a city of strangers.

Chapter Six

Conclusions: Implications for Studies of New Media Technologies, Globalization, and Belonging in a ‘World on the Move’

Mobility has stirred the pot so thoroughly that the important differences between people are no longer strongly place-related... Thus it might be said that commitments are shifting from place-related social structures (city, state, nation or neighborhood) to those (corporation, profession, friendship network) that are themselves mobile, fluid, and, for all practical purposes, place-less.

- Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock*, 1971

At some point, you will find that your work is under control but that you linger at the office because you do not have anyone to head home to and no set social life or hobbies to draw you away. During this phase, you may also find yourself relying heavily on the friends and family you left back home, mostly because you have not had the time to develop any relationships locally. Keep in mind, though, that no number of e-mails or phone calls to your close ones can replace real, live people who witness your everyday joys and sorrows, even if it is on the superficial level of a new relationship.

- Margaret Malewski, *GenXpat: The Young Professionals Guide to Making a Successful Life Abroad*, 2005

In 1971, Alvin Toffler warned that the impending need to adapt to a rapidly changing world would lead individuals and societies to experience a state of ‘Future Shock.’ The goal of this dissertation has been to better understand how, in the early 21st Century, ‘new’ media technologies are being utilized as coping mechanisms to help a particular sub-set of migrating individuals to deal with such adaptation-related shock – specifically the mode Toffler refers to in the quote above as a place-less-ness resulting from increasingly mobile lifestyles. While the ability to maintain instantaneous and inexpensive connections to geographically distant family and friends certainly emerged as one of these coping

mechanisms, my project has focused most intently on the use of “the Internet to get off the Internet” (meetup.com); or, in other words, use of *online* forms to access *offline* social events purportedly populated by other people in a similar life situation or of a similar ‘mindset’.

The single young professionals aiming to make “a successful life abroad,” to whom Malewski addresses her ‘How-to’ book quoted at the top of the chapter, make up a large portion of the people who attend these events – most of them having found this social outlet through online-searching or on the advice of friends who had been or are currently in similar social predicaments in other cities around the world. If attendees were not ‘young professionals’ *yet*, many were hoping to become so; for example, participants who were current exchange students hoping to find international employment opportunities through ‘networking’ at the parties. Others were Francophiles who had moved to France to pursue a ‘Parisian’ life they had long dreamed of, only to find the experience more lonely and alienating than they had imagined it would be. While many participants attended events in order to ‘connect with’ people in similar predicaments (living in a foreign city, and with little to no ‘social network’), others went to practice their English and gain exposure to the ‘international community’ in order to become more linguistically and socio-culturally adept in the skills necessarily to advance professional careers in a global economy. Some professed to attend *just* because they enjoy meeting people from all over the world. For example, as Francesco, from Italy, explained simply:

I think it’s interesting because you can meet people from other nationalities and *the same* nationalities. And you can meet *different* people. So I think people are there for the same reason that you are over there. To meet, to go, to exchange.

I approached this project with a question about the new types of identities that may be forming in the transnational social space known colloquially as the ‘international community’ and constituted through the online-to-offline mediated forms. However, after three months of attending meet-ups in Paris, hours of interviews with meet-up participants, additional countless hours spent studying the websites that made up my ‘data corpus’ – as well as through the processes of reading about and thinking through theories of identity, globalization, mobility, and new media to consider my interpretations of this experience – I have come to believe that the question is not about ‘new identities’ but rather about new modes of life, new needs and new solutions drawn on to meet those needs.

In this, the final chapter, I will discuss my conclusions to the project as well as their implications for research on new media technologies, globalization, and new forms of (and challenges to) belonging associated with increased awareness and resulting actions among ‘middle class’ individuals as regards the ‘world of opportunity’ that awaits them if they are open to ‘an international career’ or other forms of ‘global adventure’. I will then make suggestions for how this work can be expanded into future projects. For example, gender issues emerged as interesting in many ways, and in particular the ways that women are undertaking international careers at a much higher rate than traditionally, when their role was mainly to be what was commonly referred to as the ‘trailing spouse.’ I feel that future research could more closely examine the stories of women engaged in international lifestyles and careers.

Finally, having used this dissertation to explore how individuals who make this choice *cope* with their ‘on the move’ lifestyles, and the role of the Internet in those coping processes, I conclude the project by making a case for how future research could be

developed to assess *how* these peoples' situations (and willingness to enter into them) may be in part *produced* at the 'macro' level, particularly in relation to the needs of transnational corporations to have a culturally and geographically *flexible*, continuously mobile workforce of middle-managers to staff their 'centralized service' sectors in global cities around the world.

Implications for Studies of New Media, Globalization, & Belonging

As discussed throughout this study, to a large extent the story of 'globalization' is also the story of migrations: whether the migration of finance, information, corporate operations, mediated imagery, ideas, or people. Roland Robertson (1992) points out that as a consequence of these migrations, there is a growing 'global consciousness,' or, of the idea that 'we' are all living in 'one world.' William Robinson (in Tomlinson 1999) claims that the global has become a "*frame of reference*" within which social agents increasingly figure their existence, identities and actions' (p. 11, emphasis added). And, as previously noted, Appadurai (1996) links the development of a global imaginary to two key aspects of globalization: migration and media.

Media studies and globalization scholars alike (as well as researchers in disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, and more) have ambitiously studied the intersection of migration and media. Recently, scholars have noted that in spite of an early tendency to describe new forms of global mobility and migration as a dichotomy of all-powerful elites and desperately poor refugees, respectively, there is now an increasing recognition of many types of 'middle class' or 'middling' migrations.

This ethnographic study of a group of people that fit in various points along that middle part of a spectrum of wealth and agency demonstrated that a large segment of those

living expatriated lives are in fact *not* the elites typically discussed in globalization literature, even while some of them, through their corporate employment, do get to enjoy first class travel and luxury hotels *when on business trips*. In fact, many people who have the cultural and symbolic capital to present themselves comfortably and fit-in in situations characterized by sophistication and elite-ness, were noted to in actuality be either struggling financially or at least concerned about finances, as well as lacking in agency in many aspects of their lives. In addition to people such as Alice and Martina, who were trying to make it in Paris without the padded support of ‘expat contracts’, this was even the case for globally migrating professionals sent to Paris on such corporate contracts.

Through supranational agreements such as those enshrined in the organizing framework of the WTO, corporate employees are given time-limited migration rights, and are often sent to a new country on a three-year contract. As many of these employees are *not* ‘elites’ at home, they often undertake international careers to take advantage of opportunities that are unavailable in their ‘native’ countries. One result may be a somewhat coerced transitory lifestyle in which people are sent to one place after another, all the while increasing their repertoire of ‘global experiences,’ but also increasing feelings of loneliness, uprootedness and disconnectedness. This disconnectedness is amplified by the fact that, in conjunction with the changing model of expatriation, many migrating professionals are single and arrive in each new country alone and with an intense need for social outlets³⁵.

³⁵ Added to this conundrum is the fact that corporations do not seem to provide support for the creation of these social venues, and a certain privatization of life and lifestyle is demanded even when those lifestyles are undertaken in ways that benefit the expansion goals of transnational corporations. This can be seen in the vast literature on ‘communities of practice’ (e.g. Wenger 1988), which began as an exploration of how to increase ‘social capital’ within communities but has been co-opted as a strategy by organizational communication scholars to produce productivity ‘off the clock’ (e.g. Lave & Wenger 1991).

In addition to the meet-ups, which provided the face-to-face social venues, the end of Chapter Four discussed how new media technologies are frequently drawn on as coping mechanisms to meet these needs. In addition to daily routines of talking on Skype or chatting on MSN Messenger with distant friends and family members, or scouring friends' Facebook pages for the latest gossip, these coping mechanisms also involved joining Internet groups such as those on MeetUp.com or InterNations in order to find face-to-face events to attend.

As Fechter (2007) noted, for the new generation of expatriates, living abroad is much more implicated in the cultivating of an 'international lifestyle' than it was for traditional corporate expats, who tended to physically and socially remain in enclaves of co-nationals. This new generation has come of age with the 'global frame of reference' noted by Robertson. An interesting result of my fieldwork, however, was to note that these new 'global nomads' have also infiltrated the *national-expat* groups. Not only have expatriates started and joined meet-ups for international people, but they also attend – frequently – meet-ups that are nominally meant for bringing co-nationals (e.g. Americans in Paris) together. Therefore, although the new identification called 'the international people' emerged as more of a *functional* identification than an actual way of categorizing oneself, the functional need (to be with people) was carried over into other meet-ups, based on the assumption that all expats shared an *experiential* identification.

While everyone carried on him/herself a nationality(ies), the idea of putting a border around national groups was not a sacred one, and it was often reported to me that the 'Americans in Paris' or 'Brits in Paris' meet-up events were just as internationally diverse as, say, 'International Events in Paris.' More interesting is that no one reported feeling unwelcome at these national events (except Alice, who attended the German meet-up but

does not speak German; however, she did note that other non-Germans who *do* speak the language seemed welcome and comfortable there).

Thus it appears that the open-access form of the Internet and the flexibility allowed for by Web 2.0 fit very well with the flexibility and openness required by the ‘international’ lifestyle, and perhaps the two even affect each other. For example, in the beginning, meetup.com had pre-determined meet-up ‘categories’ that could be selected to start a meet-up in any location around the world. It was only when the leader of Expats Paris complained of the need to have the *flexibility* to create his own category (which would appear welcoming categorically to a diverse mix of nationalities) that he convinced MeetUp to add the general ‘expats’ category. Later, when the CEO of MeetUp took the founders of Paris’ top meet-up groups to dinner to get their feedback on the functionality of the site, one of the results was even *increased* flexibility for potential meet-up organizers to be able to start their own, *unlimited categories*. Now, there is no limit on meet-up categories, save for those whose titles would promote illegal activities. At the same time, the openness of the Internet and the ease in which people can find new groups to join may also be connected to the fact that lonely foreigners in Paris join so many groups, including those for nationalities other than their own.

However, while the easy-access Internet groups provide lonely or disconnected expats with face-to-face social opportunities, the extent to which new ‘identities’ are created through this practice is unclear, and I have suggested here that the case is otherwise. While group organizers use phrases such as ‘international community’ and ‘international people’ to make a wide range of people feel welcomed at their events, my experience indicated that group members drew upon these identifications mostly for their *online* profiles, frequently

selecting identifiers in conjunction with those used by the organizers, but not necessarily using them to describe themselves in person. Such was even the case online in *open-ended* answer spaces, indicating that as much as Web 2.0 has been heralded as the dawn of an age of ‘user-produced’ content, such content may still be hierarchically influenced by discourse that is coded into the sites. I do not make this claim across the board, but such a situation was certainly evident in the case of international meet-ups used by ‘deterritorialized’ people with a need to ‘connect’.

On the other hand, *collective* identifications such as an ‘international community’ *did* prove important in constructing a sense of belonging and the creation of social space. Thus, while participants’ lives were deterritorialized, they were not wholly de-spatialized. A transnational social space is created through organizer and member-produced web discourse in conjunction with routine face-to-face events – even though organized by a variety of different groups that were *not* in collaboration with each other. In this way, the Internet again proved decisive. With just the click of a button, a member could join other groups, similar to that which s/he has just joined, and indeed, most people were noted to be members of multiple meet-ups. Also, the archival aspect of the websites (e.g. a member who puts up a profile may move away from Paris, but the profile remains) helps create the sense of a large and stable ‘population’ of ‘international people,’ when in fact the groups are characterized by incredibly high turn-over. Future research should add the comparative element of other global cities, to understand the extent to which this transnational social space maintains consistency around the world (like Castells’ airport lounges and Auge’s non-places) or to what extent the situation in Paris may be unique.

Community and New Media

That what I am calling a ‘space’ goes by the name ‘the international community’ leads to questions about the meaning of community in today’s world. In interviews, organizers made clear their preoccupation with the challenges of building and maintaining a community in an age characterized by frequent migration, loose ties, and an over-abundance of *choice* coupled with lack of commitment in terms of voluntary associations. Their concerns mirrored discussions about community that have been noted and debated by scholars in terms of the opportunities and challenges to communities in relation to new media technologies.

Despite the common observance that ‘we’ are now all ‘connected’ in a single ‘web,’ Van Dijk (2006) points out that there is also a tendency to talk about social fragmentation, individualization, independence and freedom in relation to new media technologies. He claims these are two sides to the same coin. On the one hand, there is a celebration of a new ‘autonomy’ as individuals can escape the imposition of geographically bound communities and reach out to make new connections. On the other hand, there are concerns about the social capital that is lost when individuals who used to participate in and contribute to the civic life of local communities begin to branch out into ‘networks’ (Wellman & Haythornthwaite 2001). Michelle Willson (2006) refers to this as the ‘integrative/differentiating dilemma’: the concept, central to ‘community studies,’ which states there is a need to balance “concerns for the freedom or autonomy of the individual and concern for social integration” (p. 2).

There is debate as to whether the changing conception of communities and the individual’s articulation to them yields a better or worse situation for the *individual*. Willson claims that the “current use of technology leads to accentuation and a focus on the individual

and to her/his *compartmentalization*” (2006:6, emphasis added). According to her, this compartmentalization or fragmentation of the subject, combined with the transient nature of online communication, disconnects the individual from his or her surrounding community: “Despite their interconnective capacity, any interaction through multidirectional technologies physically isolates because of the singular nature of entry into the interaction...the technology of a keyboard, cellular phone and so on...while connecting an individual to another across space, simultaneously distance the individual from those with whom s/he is concretely and proximately situated” (p. 53). Interestingly, in this project, the meet-ups demonstrated a use of online communication for individuals to become *involved* with a local community. At the same time, this focus on creating solutions for *individuals* in relation to community, mirrors problems noted in maintaining momentum in those communities.

One of Van Dijk’s key insights in his formulation of the theory of ‘the network society’ is that the rise of network society has technological *and* social reasons; rather than society refashioning itself around new communications technologies, the technologies themselves have developed to serve a society whose social relations are increasingly stretched across large distances (p. 38). For Van Dijk, increased migration, and the collecting of social and business contacts along the way, is what led to the development of a ‘network society’ – and he sees the *individual*, rather than a particular place, group or organization, as the most important node in the network (Van Dijk, T. 2006:168). This idea of the individual ‘Self’ – in this case an ‘international self’ – has been key to understanding the life trajectories that lead people to temporarily converge at Paris’ international meet-ups. And indeed, Van Dijk’s focus on ‘the individual’ is in line with what scholars such as Beck and Beck-

Gernsheim (2002), Elliott and Lemert (2006), Bauman (2008), and others³⁶ have noted as one of the key transformations of ‘second’ or ‘liquid’ modernity.

While Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, and Bauman, look to more macro-institutional explanations for increasing tendencies to see the ‘self’ as a entrepreneur who must create his life as a ‘work of art’ (Bauman 2008), Elliott and Lemert focus on a psychological approach to try to understand how the increasing sense of being a part of a ‘global’ world actually affects people’s sense of ‘self.’ They suggest that “global transformations are deeply inscribed in people’s sense of their own individualism, at once demanding significant levels of psychic commitment and reorganization” and that theorists must thus try to understand the “complex, contradictory ways in which individuals constitute, reproduce and transform their sense of self-identity and individualism in relation to processes of globalization” (2006: 91).

Somewhere between the move towards increased individualization in relation to globalization, and the idea that “new media are individualizing” (Van Dijk, T. 2006: 172), it would seem that while established relations/communities may continue to be important for individuals, the establishment of *new and lasting communities* would be indeed a challenge – and particularly so in a space characterized by high turnover of individuals, such as in the Paris international community. However, in spite of frustrations expressed by meet-up organizers in Paris, they did manage to create a sense of community through their groups, even if such community was fragile in terms of member commitment. In this way, Van Dijk’s point about new media being ‘individualizing’ should be updated to consider that way that new applications such as the meet-ups’ efforts to use the Internet to create face-to-face interactions can actually *increase* a sense of community and connectedness for people who

³⁶ For an excellent review of the scholarship on individualism and ideas of the ‘self’, see Chapters 2 and 3 in Elliott and Lemert (2006).

need it. Methodologically, studying Internet-based organizations with their offline counterparts as a holistic realm of community is suggested as a way to further understand the role of new media technologies as a *part of*, rather than simply *affecting*, how ‘we’ live now.

In this case study, in order to build a dynamic community it proved important to have an open-access, rather than exclusive, message. This was particularly evident when compared with ‘A Small World’ - a rather static and over-commercialized ‘exclusive’ social networking site where what were publicized as ‘VIP’ parties or events were mostly promoters trying to attract paying bodies to their club venues. In the open-to-all sites, exclusions appeared to be more *self-enforced*, for example, if someone did not feel comfortable (or, if s/he could ‘identify’) with the messages sent through the web discourse or in the atmosphere of the face-to-face events themselves.

On the other hand, and important for considering the Western-cultural biases of ‘corporate’ globalization, the discourse of cosmopolitanism on the websites seemed at odds with the overwhelming Western socio-cultural atmosphere of events³⁷. I was frequently told by participants that attending the meet-ups made them feel more ‘connected,’ but no one could elaborate clearly on exactly what it was that they were connected *to*, other than sharing some sense of situational commonality (foreigner in Paris) and perhaps lifestyle commonality (traveled and or lived in many countries, culturally open-minded). However, my time in the field showed me that this commonality included the sharing of ‘Western’ perspectives. In her study of expats in Indonesia, Fechter (2007) noted of the younger expat generation:

It is thus partly the economic advantages of being Westerners that enable young professionals to acquire the cultural capital that finds its expression in their ‘global’

³⁷ Of course, I am certainly not the first person to note the relationship between cosmopolitan discourse and Western perspectives (e.g. De Sousa Santos 2006; Calhoun 2003; Hitchcock 2001; Robbins 1994).

lifestyles. In this sense, being a ‘global tribe’ masks a form of exclusivity which is based on fundamental economic and cultural power imbalances. However, it also potentially reconfigures boundaries of race or ethnicity. While membership of this class is not *a priori* based on ethnic criteria, it excludes in fact the majority of Indonesians due to their lack of income. Members of the wealthy Indonesian elite can join young global professionals, but only to the extent that they have acquired the requisite Western cultural capital. (p. 133)

I noted this to be the case in the Paris international meet-ups, and non-Western participants, such as Aiden, mentioned something similar even if indirectly. Also, Victor, from Mexico, made an excellent point when he brought to my attention the fact that many practicing Muslims would be excluded from attending the international meet-ups because they are held in bars.

In addition to the use of English as the ‘global language,’ it was quite clear that Western culture – and particularly Western ‘corporate culture’ – was hegemonic in the meet-up culture. The conundrum faced by professionals who bridge Eastern and Western cultures was discussed by Nashita, who in addition to having a complex combination of Indian, US and French business-cultural experiences, also had to navigate different hurdles in each culture stemming from the fact that she is a woman. She explained:

One thing about France is they’re very hierarchical in the way they respect you. So even if you’re a woman but you have a certain position, they don’t mess around with you. But, you need to stake your ground, you know? So there were times when they would think that they can kind of get away with certain things and then you just say, “NO.” And they’re like, “Oh, this is not an Indian, this is the American talking.”

But then, the company that I'm consulting with [now] happens to be a company which is funded from the US. And it was funny – they liked me because of this American-international-global experience. But they had worked with my previous company back in India, which was ineffective. So they thought I was bringing the same baggage.

Professional Migration and Gender

Nashita's experiences, in addition to bringing up interesting points about navigating cross-cultural corporate identities, also indicate that future research would benefit from a closer look at how women may experience global professional migration in ways differently than men. Kennedy (2004) claims that because they are the fastest growing group of migrants, "women are at the forefront of constructing a global society" (p. 101), and Fechter (2007), too, noted that professional migration was transitioning from the model of a wife accompanying her husband as a 'trailing spouse' to a 'gender balance' among the new generation. My experience in the field illustrated this balance to be true, although interviews with women demonstrated that in many ways, they continue to experience life abroad differently than men. For this reason, meet-ups seemed more important for women than men. For example, many female interview participants noted that they would have a difficult time entering a bar alone to try to meet people, if it were not for the fact that such was the norm at meet-up events. However, many also complained that some of the men seemed to be trolling the meet-ups for lonely women to 'hook-up' with, while the women were mainly looking for close friendships and people with whom to explore the city.

In terms of the professional side, Nashita continued to discuss how being a woman affected her experiences:

When I was involved with a joint venture that I was doing with Phillips – with the Koreans... I was an American employee, and an American woman employee, meeting with macho Asians. So that's why I was told [in a training] how to stake my ground.

Her partner, Sajay, joined the discussion of how being a professional woman affected Nashita's migration desires:

N Every day I tell him, "I think I want to head back to the US." For a different reason. France is perfect because family is not very far, in India. And US is not very far either. So it's perfect location to other cities. That's one. The main thing that I miss out about... though I work in France and everything, somehow traveling both to India, France, and the US, and having worked with so many internationals, I find for a woman who wants to have a career, the United States still offers the best opportunity. In terms of if you want to *rise*, if you want to have the option, salary parities, everything. Which I think France – it's definitely not the place. In fact, I would say India is a little bit better than France.

S India's not bad – for a woman, and if you're...

N Yeah, it's not that bad.

E I meet all kinds of women professionals from India.

S Entrepreneurs, CEOs, executives... you see them all in India.

N Exactly. It's very common... especially Indian communities back in the US are pretty much dual income. Husbands, wives – both are working. And when I mean 'dual income' it's that both of them are equally qualified. It's not just like somebody's teaching a language...

S Yeah, most of these women go for masters degrees and they'll work...

E So you feel you'd kind of like to get back to the US eventually?

N Yeah. Because I feel that there are still a lot more equal opportunities for me, being a woman.

My conversations with Nashita and Sajay not only brought up interesting considerations about being a female migrating professional, but also illuminated the extent to which corporations and career ambitions drive decisions regarding major international relocations. Their interview with me included Nashita saying, "These days, you have to have the 'international box' checked [on your resume]," and Sajay agreeing that "In my company it's very clear: If you don't have global experience, if you haven't lived in a *few* countries, you don't get promoted."

In fact, Sajay, who is from India but obtained an MBA and work experience in the US, explained the new global business climate with an anecdote from his own experience:

I moved to France for a couple of years. I stayed a little longer, maybe three years. And then I got asked by my company – they said: "Would you like to be a French expat in India?" Think about it. They're sending me back to my *own* country, as a French expat. This is what I tell you: *This* is the new global situation.

Because hey, the way they looked at me was, this guy's American. I mean, you know, I was hired in the US, I spent, you know, more than a decade in the US...

So, I went back to India as a French, on a French contract, working for an American company in my own home country.

This brings me to my final conclusion: future research into the nexus of professional migration and the new trend in online-to-offline groups that create social outlets for ‘international people’ must address the possible role of transnational corporations in producing these ‘international’ subjectivities or at least helping to mobilize desires to undertake a career of continual international migration.

Future Research: Citizens of CorpoNations³⁸?

While the Brubaker and Cooper framework I used to interpret the question of ‘new identities’ in Chapter Five was a more micro-oriented model, other more macro-oriented theories claim the challenge at the heart of discussions of identity today revolves around tensions between seeing identity as a set of identifications based on historically situated categories of race, gender, and geographic community, or as associating them with shifting, lifestyle-oriented identity clusters more related to consumer markets and corporate needs.

A recent essay by sociolinguists Machin and Van Leeuwen (2008) draws attention to these conflicting perspectives. In fact, the authors note a pattern between marketing strategies and the development of identity *theories* (linking identity and media):

As marketing experts and large corporations began to emphasize production over consumption, so did theorists of identity and meaning. As they abandoned singular, stable demographic identities in favor of complex, flexible and individual identities,

³⁸ This term was coined by Matias Guisado during a conversation we had about this subject.

so did theorists of identity. As they championed the consumer's power of choice, so did theorists of identity. (p. 55)

They argue for a more complex view of identity in which:

At least two powerful “regimes” of identity, driven by different needs and interests, operate side by side, that of nation-states and that of large global corporations... The question is how nation-states and global corporations (re)construct identity in different ways, and how people use these (re)constructions when they talk about their own identity. (p. 56)

I see this effort to understand how symbols relating to both nation-states and global corporations are deployed in discussions of identity as a logical next step in my approach to seeking to understand the needs of globally migrating professionals and the development of new media applications to meet those needs.

This dissertation has looked at how an international community is created through a combination of online and offline endeavors that bring people together in transnational space as a population of international people. However, my interpretations of the ethnographic field indicate that the actual experience of being an ‘international person’ falls short – emotionally and financially – of the ease and excitement that surrounds this category/identification in online discourse (as well as public and scholarly discourse about this group of ‘privileged migrants’).

Not yet deeply explored in the critical literature is the way that ‘global minds’ are identified and mobilized for productive labor by Human Resource strategists. In Scullion and Collings (2006) book “Global Staffing,” human resource managers are advised that “global managers are defined by their *state of mind*, or their capacity to work effectively in varied

cultural, organizational and functional situations” (p. 67, emphasis added). The book includes sections on finding and developing ‘global mindsets.’ And among the many benefits of transferring managers to different sites around the world as part of a process of developing their global mindedness, is said to be the following: “The development of informal personal global networks provide managers with access to information and resources to operate effectively in the transnational” (p. 112). Thus a connection is suggested between the use of meet-ups for lonely international people to meet each other, and the possibility that the networking that results from their meeting could be of service to the corporations.

Additionally, an article in the *Journal of World Business* (Kedia & Mukherji 1999) advised:

There is a growing need for managers to become global managers with a global perspective...Managers have a number of mindsets that range from the domestically-oriented defender, and continuing on to the explorer, the controller, and the globally-oriented integrator. *For global managers to be effective, they need to develop the global mindset of an integrator.* (p. 230, emphases added)

The ‘international self’ and the constitution of ‘international community’ support the labor needs of transnational corporations by providing a force of flexible, mobile, culturally-nimble managers that consider as a matter of pride that they no longer demand the security of home, stability, and certainty that was the provenance of corporate life in the industrial welfare state. Thus we can ask if the global-minds are produced as subjectivities to mobilize immaterial (symbolic) labor *as* lifestyle in accordance with global capitalist expansion.

Benjamin explained to me how his ever-expanding transnational corporation trains employees in the core values, one of which is explicitly aimed at the creation of employees' flexibility in different global cultures. As he explains it:

More generally it's just an open-mind and... what they called being "transversal", which doesn't exist. It's just a Franglais word that they've invented. It's not cultural, it's being – it's a bit cross-functional. But it's just being able to... being *flexible*. It's more than flexible. It's being open-minded, flexible, and working with different, in different styles, different languages, different customs.

Indeed, none of my participants had learned to internalize the cultural flexibility of 'transversality' more than Benjamin. On my final night in Paris, I attended a meet-up, and sent emails to all of my interview participants and other meet-up friends to let them know it would be the end of the study and that I would love to see them all at one final event. At the end of the night, on the metro with Benjamin and a few other friends, I began to feel the familiar pangs of sadness that, for me, have always accompanied departures and goodbyes. I would like to end this dissertation with the last entry from my field-notes, an entry I feel truly demonstrates the way in which, through the 'international community,' relationships and a collective are indeed created, yet the creation is of a 'we' in which all remain alone as *selves*, ever moving, but always knowing that the network grows:

I walked with Claire, Benjamin, and Miki to the metro. Miki got off first and then me. When I was about to my stop, I mentioned that I hated to have to say goodbye on the train. "No, no!!" Benjamin said, "Trains are the best place for goodbyes. It's so dramatic... you get to watch the train move away and wave and run after it!!" Okay,

I said. And we all hugged and gave the kisses and said goodbye. “Don’t forget to run after us!!” said Benjamin as I got off. I waited outside on the platform, watching he and Claire through the glass, all of us waving and blowing kisses. The train started to move and I made a movement like I was running after it... they kept waving and smiling and reaching out to me, as they slowly and then more quickly moved away. Then they were gone and I was alone on the platform. Smiling, I turned around and walked toward the exit. (Field-notes, December 4, 2009)

Appendix A

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION FORM

OFFICE USE ONLY

IRB NO. _____

Form Instructions:

- To complete the form, press TAB or SHIFT TAB between boxes and enter an 'X' or text. For assistance, contact the Office for Research Protections.
- Submit recruitment materials, informed consent forms, and all other materials as attachments to the application. **Do NOT** include within the application.
- Handwritten applications will NOT be accepted.

Project Title: **Connected, but to What? A Case Study of New Media, Mobility, and Transnational Belonging in Global Paris**

Exemption Screening Questions:

PLEASE ANSWER ALL OF THE SCREENING QUESTIONS. If you answer 'Yes' to any of the following questions A through D below, then **STOP** and use one of the *Applications for the Use of Human Participants – Expedited & Full Reviews* for initial IRB review.

If you answer 'No' to all of the questions A through D below, continue to complete this *Exemption Determination Form*.

A. For research involving special populations, interventions or manipulations

1. Does your research involve prisoners?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
2. Does your research involve using survey or interview procedures with children?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
3. Does your research involve the observation of children in settings where the investigator(s) will participate in the activities being observed?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
4. Does your research involve the use of deception?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

B. For research using survey procedures, interview procedures, observational procedures, and questionnaires

1. If data are to be audio or video recorded, is there potential harm ³⁹ to participants if the information is revealed or disclosed?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
2. If participants will be identified either by name or through demographic data, is there potential for harm to participants if the information is revealed or disclosed?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
3. Is the research regulated by the FDA and is NOT a food or taste study as outlined in category 6?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

C. For research using existing⁴⁰ or archived data, documents, records or specimens only

1. Will any data, documents, records or specimens be collected from participants	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
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³⁹ Harm to participants means that any disclosure of the human participants' responses outside the research could reasonably place the participants at risk of criminal or civil liability or can be damaging to the participants' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

⁴⁰ Existing means the items exist before the research was proposed or was collected prior to the research for a purpose other than the proposed research.

after the submission of this form?		
2. If the data, documents, records or specimens are originally labeled in such a manner that the participants can be identified, directly or indirectly through identifying links, is the investigator recording the data for the purposes of this research in such a manner that participants can be identified, directly or indirectly through identifying links (e.g., demographic information that might reasonably lead to the identification of individual participants – name, phone number, or any code number that can be used to link the investigator’s data to the source record – medical record number or hospital admission number)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
3. If genetic tests are conducted on specimens, are the specimens and/or results linkable to participants or contain identifiable information (coded)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
4. Would the data, documents, records or specimens being used in this study be classified as a “restricted usage” dataset?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

D. For research using protected health information

1. Will the research involve the use or disclosure of individually identifiable health information including: names, dates (other than years), telephone numbers, fax numbers, electronic email addresses, social security numbers, medical record numbers, health plan beneficiary numbers, account numbers, certificate/license numbers, device identifiers and serial numbers, web URLs, internet addresses, biometric identifiers, full face or comparable images, or any unique identifying number, characteristic or code?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
--	------------------------------	-----------------------------

Principal Investigator: Erika Polson	PSU User ID (e.g., abc123): 930625420
University Status (Faculty, Staff, Student, etc.): Student	Telephone Number: 617.905.8543
Email Address: ekp113@psu.edu	Dept: Film, Video & Media Studies
College: Communications	Campus: University Park
Mailing Address: 115 Carnegie Building, University Park, PA 16802	

Faculty Advisor, if PI is a student: Dennis K. Davis	PSU User ID (e.g., abc123):
Email Address: dkd3@psu.edu	Telephone Number: 814.865.2171
Dept: Film, Video & Media Studies	College: Communications
Mailing Address: 115 Carnegie Building	Campus: University Park

Is there anyone you wish to include on correspondence related to this study (e.g., a study coordinator, etc.)? NO.	
Name:	PSU User ID (e.g., abc123):
University Status (Faculty, Staff, Student, etc.):	Telephone Number:

Email Address:	Dept:
College:	Campus:
Mailing Address:	Role in this study: Choose one of the following

1. Funding Source: Indicate the name and mailing address of internal and external sources of funding. If the study is not funded, indicate such. If applicable, a copy of your grant proposal must be included with this application.

The study is not funded. My general doctoral education is funded by a graduate assistantship from the College of Communications, but that is not contingent on this project.

2. Class Project: Is this a class project?

Yes → Provide the following information:

- Instructor's Name:
- Course Title and Number:
- Semester course is being offered:

X No

3. Conflict of Interest: Do you or any individual who is associated with/responsible for the design, the conduct, or the reporting of this research have an economic interest in or act as an officer or a director for any outside entity whose financial interests would reasonably appear to be affected by this research project?

Yes → Refer to Penn State Policy RA20 AND HR91 for additional information

X No

4. Exempt Research Categories: Read the following categories and choose one or more that apply to your research. Your research must fit in at least one category in order to be considered for an exemption determination.

Category 1: Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods. **(This category may include children. This category may NOT include prisoners or be FDA-regulated.)**

X Category 2: Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observations of public behavior unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human participants can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the participants; and (ii) any disclosure of the human participants' responses outside the research could reasonably place the participants at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the participants' financial standing, employability, or reputation. **(This category may NOT include prisoners or be FDA-regulated.)**

- ◆ Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement) for which participants cannot be identified, or release of the information would not be harmful to the participant. **(This category may include children.)**
- ◆ Research involving the use of survey procedures or interview procedures or observation of public behavior for which participants cannot be identified, or release of the information would not be harmful to the participant. **(This category may NOT include children except for research involving the observation of public behavior of children, when the investigator does not participate in the activities being observed.)**

- ◆ **PLEASE NOTE:** This category **CANNOT** include the use of diaries, journals, or asking participants to perform a task(s) [e.g., conducting searches on the Internet & then completing a questionnaire]. The entire study must fit into a category not just portions of it.

Category 3: Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observations of public behavior that is not exempt under #2 of this section, if: (i) the human participants are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office; or (ii) Federal statute(s) require(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter. **(This category may NOT include prisoners or be FDA-regulated.)**

Category 4: Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that participants cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the participants. **(This category may include children. Existing data means the items exist [are 'on the shelf'] before the research was proposed or were collected prior to the research for any purpose. This category may NOT include prisoners or be FDA-regulated.)**

Category 5: Research and demonstration projects that are conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine: (i) public benefit or service programs; (ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs; (iii) possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures; (iv) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs. **(This category may include children. This category may NOT include prisoners or be FDA-regulated.)**

Category 6: Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, (i) if wholesome foods without additives are consumed or (ii) if a food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level for a use found to be safe, or agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. **(This category may include children. This category may NOT include prisoners.)**

NOTE:

- The Principal Investigator is responsible for ensuring that all individuals conducting procedures described in this application are trained adequately prior to involving human participants.
- All personnel listed on this application who (1) are responsible for the design/conduct of the study, (2) will have access to the human participants (i.e., will consent participants, conduct the study), or (3) will have access to identifying AND confidential information must successfully complete the IRB's Training on the Protection of Human Participants or provide verification of training from their home institution. PSU's training may be located at <http://www.research.psu.edu/orp/education/modules/irb/index.asp>. **Approval will NOT be granted until all individuals have successfully completed the training.** Verification of training does NOT need to be sent in if the individual completed the Penn State's training.

-
- As personnel change, you must submit a *Modification Request Form – Exemption* to add or remove personnel.
-

5. Research Personnel: Provide the name of the other individual(s) assisting with this study who (1) will be responsible for the design/conduct of the study, (2) have access to the human participants (i.e., will consent participants, conduct the study), or (3) have access to identifying AND confidential information. If the individual does not have a PSU Access User ID, please provide some other form of contact information. If additional space is needed, attach a separate sheet containing the same information.

N/A

6. Participants: Estimated numbers of participants/samples/charts to be involved (Enter one number – not a range):

In-depth interviews: 20 Ethnography (participant/observation): 200

7. Participants: Will there be an equal representation of:

Gender Identity	? Yes	? No
Racial/ethnic groups	? Yes	? No
Sexual Orientation	? Yes	? No

NOTE: I am conducting ethnography of a group of people that claims to be 'diverse' -- but I will not know the exact nature of that diversity until I'm in the field. For in-depth interviews, I will select a sample of people that is, as much as possible, representative of the overall group in terms of gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation ('representative' will be approximated within the limits imposed by the fact that this is an 'unbounded' community).

8. Participants: Age range – Choose all that apply:

<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 1 year	<input type="checkbox"/> 7 – 12 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 18 – 25 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 40 – 65 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 – 6 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 13 – 17 years	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 26 – 40 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 65+ years

9. Recruitment: Describe from where and how the participants will be identified or recruited, who will make the initial contact with the participants, and how you plan to distribute or display any recruitment materials for this research (e.g., bulletin board, emails, newspaper advertisement).

I will attend, as a participant observer, events organized by and for "international people" in Paris (free to join, self-selective: if you consider yourself an 'international person', you can attend these events, which are advertised on free-to-join websites for the "international community in Paris"). In conversation with participants, I will identify myself as a doctoral student conducting research at Penn State University and share my research topic. Then, I will ask certain people (with an attempt to achieve representative diversity) to make appointments with me for in-depth interviews.

Sometimes I may make interview requests over email, with somebody I have seen on the online membership pages of these groups (if their posted profiles meet my criteria and I have not actually met them in person). I will not only make interview requests in terms of their diversity, but also by noting how other cues from their conversation pique my interest in relation to my project. For example, if someone has moved to at least three different countries as part of their career trajectory, they will make a more appropriate interview participant than someone who has just moved this one time (because I am looking into the lifestyles and media use of people who build their lives and careers based on international mobility).

10. Recruitment: Indicate how participants will be recruited to participate in this study & attach copies of the materials. Choose all that apply:

<input type="checkbox"/> Advertisement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> In-person Script (Verbal)	<input type="checkbox"/> Flyer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Email
<input type="checkbox"/> Telephone Script	<input type="checkbox"/> Information Sheet	<input type="checkbox"/> Letter	<input type="checkbox"/> Other → Explain:

11. Consent: Describe the methods you plan to use in order to obtain informed permission to participate in this research. Attach a copy of the written description or script for oral presentation. If you cannot obtain informed permission for this study, explain why it cannot be obtained (e.g., the data are de-identified).

Because my research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to participants and involves no procedure for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context (no risk interviews), I plan to request verbal consent only, through the "waiver of documentation" of informed consent provision. See the attachment for the script for oral presentation of verbal consent.

12. Compensation: If individuals will be offered compensation, indicate the type and amount of compensation that will be offered. X Compensation will NOT be offered → Skip to Question 14

13. Compensation: If extra/class credit is being offered, describe the alternative available for earning the extra/class credit. The alternative must be equal in time and effort to participating in the research.

14. Recordings: If recording will be done for this research, indicate the type of recording that will be made.

Audio Video Photographs Recordings will **NOT** be made → Skip to #16

15. Recordings: Describe (a) where the recordings will be stored; (b) who will have access to the recordings; (c) how the recordings will be transcribed and coded, if applicable; (d) who will transcribe the recordings; (e) how and by what year will the recordings be destroyed. If you wish to retain the recordings indefinitely, provide a sound justification for doing so.

A) Recordings will be recorded in digital format and stored on my laptop computer; B) Only I will have access to the recordings, although they will not be protected by a password (however, my participants will not state their names on the recording, so they will not be identifiable); C) Recordings will be transcribed by listening and typing, aided by "Express Scribe" software; D) I will be the sole transcriber. E) I will erase the digital files in July 2010 – one year after my dissertation defense.

16. Abstract: The abstract below will assist the ORP in reviewing your research. The abstract must address the important elements of the exemption category you indicated your research meets in Question 4 above. The information in the abstract must include a specific description of the procedure(s) involving human participants to demonstrate the study meets all the requirements for the chosen category (ies).

This dissertation research project combines online and offline ethnography of managerial professionals living and working abroad, using the expatriate community of Paris as a case study.

The project fits into Categories 2 and 4.

Category 2: Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observations of public behavior unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human participants can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the participants; and (ii) any disclosure of the human participants' responses outside the research could reasonably place the participants at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the participants' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Assure condition 2.i. and/or 2.ii. applies and briefly explain. Attach copies of tests, surveys, interview questions, focus group topics or applicable instruments.

Regarding the aspects of my research that involve interviews and observations of public behavior, conditions 2.i and 2.ii apply.

Condition 2.i: In interviews, I will use the verbal consent recording on audio, and will only ask participants to state their first names. I will then change those names in the dissertation. I will not ask for other identifiers such as social security, etc. To the extent that I may use short writing samples from the Internet sites, a participant whose phrase was used could be found by putting the exact phrase into 'google.com' or another search engine. However, their profiles on those sites are not associated with their full names (members choose to either make up a screen name or be identified by their first name only); also, the sites do not list direct contact information such as email or phone. Note that the study does not include children. See **Attachment** for a list of interview questions.

Condition 2.ii: Any disclosure of participants' responses outside the research would NOT place the participants at risk. The nature of my questions is not sensitive and does not involve gathering information

about illegal or other socially maligned practices. I will ensure that all participants in my research have the requisite legal permissions to reside and work in France, so they are not a vulnerable population in terms of their 'immigration' status being at risk in relation to participation in this study.

Category 4: Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that participants cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the participants.

Provide the following information for the data/specimens that will be used in this study:

Brief explanation about the original study and the origin of the data/specimens – include web address (URL) if known & applicable

I will analyze the discourse on publicly accessible websites that attempt to serve as online communities for "international people" in Paris. The sites I will analyze are:

1. The Paris New-in-Town MeetUp (hosted on Meetup.com)
2. Expats Paris (hosted on Meetup.com)
3. The International Nomad Community, also known as "INC" (hosted on Meetup.com)
4. International Events in Paris (hosted on Meetup.com)
5. Kunveno (Kunveno.com)
6. Horn's Social Agenda (paris.horns-club.com)

List of all data points that will be used in this study (or attach the data collection sheet) and what the data/specimens will be used for:

I will analyze those sites by looking at how the groups describe themselves in the About Us section; what types of categories are used to create member profiles in the "members" section (e.g. Where are you from?); the answers to those category questions; and how members describe themselves in their "introduction" section.

A statement regarding how the data/specimens to be reviewed exist as of the date of the submission of this application (i.e., the data/specimens are 'on the shelf' and no new data/specimens will be added to this study

The online communities are dynamic, with new members joining continually. I will begin my study by analyzing the sites as they exist on September 1, 2008 (with screen shots to save the data as-is on that date) but will also monitor the sites for updates periodically over the course of the study.

If the data/specimens are NOT publicly available, a description of how access to the data/specimens will be gained. Submit written documentation of permission/approval from the person authorized to grant access to the data. The documentation must include the following information: (1) a statement indicating identifiers linked to the data/specimens will not be provided OR (2) if identifiers are linked to the data, a statement indicating access to identifiable data/specimens has been granted, why this is necessary, and that the data/specimens will be recorded in such a manner that participants cannot be identified directly or indirectly through coded identifiers linked to the participants

There is one site in the study – internationations.org – that can be accessed only by members. Membership is free, but must be requested by filling out a form. I am a member and thus am able to access the site. I have contacted the director of the site to attain permission to use it in my research. First name-only pseudonyms will be used to identify any quotes taken from member discussions on the site forums. All other sites are public.

Use the following sections to complete your abstract:

a. Background/Rationale: Briefly provide the background information and rationale for performing the study and any potential benefits.

Arjun Appadurai (1996) locates cross-border migrations of *people* and *media* as the 'core' of globalization's complex connectedness. Scholarship at this core has shown that questions of belonging and identity can be closely related to media practices, and that media-production by people living outside of an originating 'homeland' involves strategic and multivalent processes that can lead to new 'hybrid' and transnational identities.

However, in the large body of work that has developed at this nexus, a burgeoning group of migrants is almost completely omitted: a new generation of midlevel professionals who go from global city to global city, working just a few years in each site and weaving complicated social networks along the way. These transnational managerial/professionals make up a group unique for its ethnic diversity and its *continual* migration – characteristics that take it outside the boundaries of traditional research conceptions that categorize migrants by ethnic, religious or national/regional heritage and often imagine a more stable and linear migration wherein people migrate from 'country A' to 'country B' to put down roots in the new land, even while continuing the connections to the homeland or with a diaspora.

My research focuses on how this new generation of migrants uses media technologies to construct and participate in social networks of 'international people'. While certainly many mobile professionals arrive in a foreign city and immediately immerse themselves in the local cohort of their co-nationals, this study focuses on those who, instead, seek to become a part of a broader 'international community.'

Using the 'global city' of Paris as a case study, I will analyze the discourse on websites produced by and for migrating professionals (through use of such sites, it's possible to move to Paris, not know anybody, and have a social event to go to *every night* of your first week in town). I will also spend three months conducting ethnographic research of the offline 'communities' created through these websites.

b. Key Objectives: Summarize the study's objectives, aims or goals.

For the first step to consider the implications of this new group of globally mobile professionals, I want to understand *how they describe themselves*...their identities, the 'group' identity, and their relationships to 'others.' I will begin to do this by analyzing discourse on the websites (listed above) for 'international people' in Paris. I will use a framework, suggested by Brubaker & Cooper (2000) that tries to account for processes of separating *and* processes of linking by breaking 'social construction of identity' into three parts: Identification & categorization; Self-understanding & social location; and Commonality, connectedness, & groupness.

Then, the fact that these web-based groups exist to create an offline rather than online community begs the question of what actually happens in the real-time meetings. Is there a sense of 'community', and what is the nature of that community? How does the community cohere, if its members are mobile and thus frequently relocating? How important are the websites to this community – are they simply a portal to access it or do they also provide means for sustaining it? How does the sociality of the websites work in conjunction with the offline social events? These are preliminary questions, but the nature of ethnographic research is such that the questions should remain as open as possible, with interpretations drawn during and after participant observation. So, a major part of my objective at this stage is to ask simply, what is happening here with this new 'group', and how can I understand the importance of media and communication technologies to its creation, facilitation, and sustenance?

c. Study Population, Samples and/or Charts: Describe the characteristics of the participant population, such as anticipated number to be involved, age range, gender, ethnic background and health status.

In an ethnography of North American and European expatriate communities in Indonesia, Anne-Meike Fechter (2007) calls attention in her final chapter to the fact that something new is happening: she notes the emergence of a *new* generation of ‘mobile professionals’ that differs from the ‘traditional family expatriates’ that made up the focus of her study.

Among her observations regarding this new group, Fechter says they *differ* from traditional expatriates in that they are:

- Characterized by their highly itinerant work and life patterns, frequently change employers and places of residence of their own initiative, and take up a series of jobs in various countries
- Between the ages of 25 and 40, and are mostly single or in a non-cohabiting relationship
- Gender-balanced, moving abroad as part of their own career rather than that of a spouse
- Constructing themselves as professionals with an *international outlook* in terms of their career, place of residence, and social networks.
- Explicitly aiming to work abroad – not only to gain international work experience, ‘but because a ‘global’ *lifestyle* is seen as attractive and exciting’

I will study these professional migrants at their points of intersection with the global networks of communication technologies that produce and enable their mobility, both professionally and socially. The ethnographic study of these groups in Paris will include participant observation of events organized by the groups (all of which are free, public events) as well as in-depth interviews conducted privately (away from the events) with at least 20 people.

d. Major Eligibility Criteria: Identify the criteria for inclusion and exclusion.

For inclusion, a participant must be a self-described “international person” (or “global nomad,” “globally-minded” or “internationally-minded” – all categories taken from the websites of study). For the participant-observation, anyone who attends events organized by the websites (free and public) will be included. For my 20 in-depth interviews, I will aim for gender balance and diversity of national and racial backgrounds. I will also try to get a majority of interview participants to be people who have lived in more than one country as an expatriate, although for another perspective would also like to interview one or two people who are on their first expatriate assignment.

I will exclude people who have immigrated to France and become permanent residents with no plans to move to another country in the future, as these people would be considered more ‘traditional’ expatriates and not fit into the new generation I am exploring. Also, I will not interview anybody who does not have legal permission to work in France.

e. Research Procedures involving participants: Summarize the study’s procedures by providing a step-by-step process of what participants will be asked to do, emphasizing the procedures that may cause risk. **Include enough details to demonstrate that the research meets the requirement(s) for the exemption category (ies) chosen in Question 4 above.**

Participant Observation: I will attend events for members of online communities (listed above) for “international people” – a self-selecting/identifying group. Membership in all of these communities is free, and proof of membership is not required to attend events. It is more that the online forum is a place where the events are advertised, yet the events themselves are public and free to attend (other expenses may occur, such as each individual’s cost of a drink or food if the event is held in a bar or restaurant). At the events, I will participate as a member (having lived abroad in multiple countries and being in Paris as a part of my career trajectory, I, too, self-identify as an international person) with full disclosure in regards to my role as a researcher. When talking to people, I will introduce myself as “a doctoral student from The

Pennsylvania State University who is in Paris to conduct research” and will continue by explaining that these very events (and the websites that create them) are the object of my study. If a person has questions beyond that, I will answer them openly. Otherwise, I will continue to participate as any other member would, and take notes afterwards about the experience. Exact conversations, with quotations, will not be a part of my note-taking... rather it will focus on more general observations, leaving exact quotations to come out of recorded in-depth interviews. When I have noticed that someone I’m speaking to at an event may make a good interview participant, I will ask that person if they would be interested in setting up an interview appointment (Please see Attachment A for a copy of the Recruitment Script).

In-depth Interviews: Interviews will be approximately one hour long and will be coordinated to create as little inconvenience as possible to the participant. I will go to a place of their choosing (home, office, coffee shop, bar, etc), insofar as I feel my safety will not be compromised in said location, and at a time chosen to fit their schedules. Both before and after the interview, I will encourage them to contact me if they have any further questions, comments, or concerns about the interview, and will provide detailed contact information for both myself and my adviser. Interviews will be audio recorded for accuracy, and then transcribed. The original audio recordings will be saved until one year after the defense of my dissertation. (For the “Verbal Consent Form” and a “List of Interview Questions,” please see the Attachments B and C.)

f. Risks and Discomforts: If applicable, describe any reasonably foreseeable risks and discomforts – physical, psychological, social, legal or other.

The nature of my project does not imply any reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts. I will only be interviewing migrants who have legal residency status in the host country. When recruiting for interview participants, if anyone seems uncomfortable with the idea of being interviewed, I will not press for their participation but will instantly assure them that it is not necessary that they participate. None of the question I am asking should have any effects on the interview participants’ psychological, social, or legal standing.

g. Confidentiality & Privacy: Explain how the confidentiality of the data and the privacy of the participants will be maintained.

In interviews, I will use the verbal consent recording on audio, and will only ask participants to state their first names. I will then change those names in the dissertation. I will not ask for other identifiers such as social security, etc. To the extent that I may use short writing samples from the Internet sites, a participant whose phrase was use could be found by putting the exact phrase into ‘google.com’ or another search engine. However, their profiles on those sites are not associated with their full names (members choose to either make up a screen name or be identified by their first name only); also, the sites do not list direct contact information such as email or phone.

h. Investigator Qualifications & Specific Role in the Research: Describe the role of each individual (including the advisor, if applicable) listed on this form. Clearly state (1) the procedures or techniques he/she will be performing and (2) his/her level of experience in performing the procedures/techniques.

I will perform every aspect of this research by myself. As an ABD doctoral candidate, I have met all of the College of Communications’ criteria to perform the research, including the requisite number of methods and other courses, the taking and passing of the comprehensive exams, and the defense of the proposal of this dissertation project.

My dissertation adviser, Dennis Davis, is available to read my work and provide comments and suggestions, but will not be involved in performing the research itself.

i. References: If applicable, provide any relevant literature references/citations.

The following references were cited in this abstract. A more detailed reference list for my dissertation is available upon request.

Appadurai (1996). Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Brubaker, R.; Cooper, F. (Feb., 2000). "Beyond Identity", *Theory and Society*, Vol. 29, No. 1., pp. 1-47.

Fechter, A.M. (2007). Transnational Lives: Expatriates in Indonesia. Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.

17. Assurances

I agree to report to the Office for Research Protections (ORP), in a timely manner, information regarding (a) any injury to a human participant, (b) any unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others, or (c) any new information involving risks to participants. All individuals listed on this form have completed the training requirements. I have adequately explained in this form the role of each individual and their experience in performing that role.

I understand that any changes that occur after the initial exempt determination is made, **must be submitted to and reviewed by the ORP before implementation**, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. In the latter instance, the ORP must be notified by the next workday.

I affirm that as the principal investigator on this study, I will adhere to the policies and procedures described in Penn State's Federalwide Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections as well as Federal regulations for the protection of human participants involved in research (45CFR46; 21CFR parts 50 & 56). Copies of these documents are available in the ORP upon request or on their website – <http://www.research.psu.edu/orp/>.

Signature of Principal Investigator, REQUIRED

Date

I hereby confirm that I have read this application and my signature denotes the completeness and accuracy of the information provided.

PRINT Name of Faculty Advisor, REQUIRED IF PI IS A STUDENT

SIGNATURE of Faculty Advisor, REQUIRED IF PI IS A STUDENT

Date

I hereby confirm that I have read this application and my signature denotes departmental/unit approval of this project. To the best of my knowledge, the information in the attached application relating to members of my department is correct.

The investigator(s) who are members of my department are qualified to perform the roles proposed for them in this application. Any novice researchers from my department will be supervised by qualified investigators.

PRINT Name of PI's Department/Unit Head, REQUIRED

SIGNATURE of PI's Department/Unit Head, REQUIRED

Date

Appendix B

Recruitment Scripts

Script for verbal interview recruitment:

Hi, my name is Erika Polson. I'm a doctoral student doing research at Penn State University on how expatriates use media to build communities abroad. Would you be interested in being interviewed on this topic? The interview will take about an hour and will be a pretty informal discussion on your use of Internet communities to build your social life in a new country and to maintain connections with people in places where you've lived previously.

To keep the interview conversational while also making sure I get everything that you say, I will be recording the conversation with digital audio. If you're interested, we could make an appointment for a time and place that is most convenient for you.

Script for email interview recruitment:

Hello. I'm a doctoral student at Penn State University doing research on how expatriates use media to build communities abroad. From your membership profile on (website), it seems you have a range of international experiences that would make you an interesting person to speak with on this topic. Would you be interested in setting up an interview with me?

The interview will take about an hour and will be an informal discussion on your use of Internet communities to build your social life in a new country and to maintain connections with people in places where you've lived previously. I will also want to talk about your general, overall experiences living and working abroad, and the impact communication technologies such as email, Skype, online news and other media have had on your experience as an expatriate.

To keep the interview conversational while also making sure I get everything that you say, I will be recording the conversation with digital audio. If you're interested, we could make an appointment for a time and place that is most convenient for you. If you have any questions about the project and the interviews, I'd be happy to answer them.

Looking forward to hearing from you. Many thanks,

Erika Polson
Doctoral Candidate
College of Communications
The Pennsylvania State University
Email: ekp113@psu.edu / Tel: 1.617.905.8543

Appendix C

General Interview Questions

My interview style is conversational and very open, in fitting with the ethnographic tradition, which is somewhat looser than a strict social science approach. My general goal is to open up a discussion of how participants use Internet communities to build their social lives in a new country and to maintain connections with people in places where they've lived previously.

In addition to specifically wanting to hear about their experiences with online communities to connect them with social events in Paris, I also want to talk about their general, overall experiences living and working abroad, and the impact communication technologies such as email, Skype, online news and other media have had on their experience as an expatriate.

The basic questions that will form the foundation of the conversation are the following:

Overall Background Questions

- What is your 'nationality'?
- Are you married, living with a partner, or single? (If partnered) What is the nationality of your partner?
- How long have you been living in Paris?
- What brought you here?
- Is this your first experience living abroad?
- Can you tell me the story of your 'international life'? (For example, what led you to decide to go abroad the first time? Was it a career opportunity or something personal? Where have you lived and traveled? What has been your trajectory in terms of time, place, and events?)
- How do you see yourself in terms of where you belong, and is that complicated by your experiences abroad? For example, when people ask, "Where are you from?" is that a complicated question or an easy question for you? Why?

Communications Technologies Questions

- (If the person has been living abroad for more than 10 years): How has your experience as an expatriate changed along with developments in new communications technologies?
- (Or, if the person has been an expatriate for less than 10 years): Do you think that it would have been more difficult for you to live abroad in the days before the Internet? Why or why not?
- How do you use the Internet? For example, let's run through a typical day in your life...how does the online world fit into it?
 - o Where do you get your 'news'? A variety of sites or just one? Do you talk/write about the news with friends living in other countries? Do you feel it's important to keep up with news about your home country from a source located there?

- How do you communicate with friends? With family? Is there a difference between how you communicate with friends/family who are far away versus those who are here? How is that?
- What are the websites that you frequently visit, and for what purposes?
- Do you watch television online? What shows? (Mostly from your 'home' country, or a mix?)
- Do you blog? (Have your own or participate in others' blogs)... If so, on what topic?

Expatriate Media Questions

- I met you because you use (website), which is for “international people”. Do you use any other websites that are specifically for expatriates? If so, what are they? What have your experiences been with these sites?
- Do you use/participate in any sites that are for people from (person's national home)? (If no), Why not? And why then did you decide that you would rather use the site for “international people”? (If yes), Which ones? And, (if yes), why did you also decide to join the site for International people?
- Do you attend many of the events organized by these web groups? What motivates you to participate in these events? (Business networking, social, etc??)
- Have the sites been helpful to you in terms of feeling more comfortable relocating to a new country? Why or why not?
- How do you define yourself on these websites? For example, I've seen some say they are for “international people”, others say for “global nomads”, and others say for “expatriates.” How would you call yourself in terms of this international identity? What is an “(insert answer)”, and why do you identify yourself as such?

Appendix D

Verbal Consent Script

(To be read and audio recorded at beginning of interview)

Hello (Participant),

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed today. Once again, my name is Erika Polson and I am a doctoral student in the College of Communications at The Pennsylvania State University.

VERBAL CONSENT:

First off, are you 18-years-old or older?

-- PAUSE for response --

IF “NO”:

I’m sorry, I am not permitted to interview people under the age of 18. I apologize for the mix-up, thank you for your time today.

IF “YES”:

Thank you. Moving on, the focus of this interview will be to talk about how you use media and other communications technologies to manage your life abroad. I’m also just very interested in the networks you build as someone with an international lifestyle, and how you use communications technologies to create and maintain those networks. The interview will go on for about an hour and will include around twenty questions.

Your participation in is voluntary, and your completion of the interview constitutes implied consent. You do not have to answer any questions you are uncomfortable or unfamiliar with and you may stop at any time. Your participation in this research is confidential.

I’d like to record the interview so that I can transcribe it later rather than disrupt our conversation by taking notes.

Will you give your permission to be audio-recorded?

-- PAUSE for response --

Will you give your permission for direct quotes to be used in publications/presentations?

-- PAUSE for response --

IF “NO” TO Audio QUESTION:

No problem, I will certainly respect your wishes. Please feel free to ask any questions or concerns you may have at any time. Are you ready to begin?

IF “NO” TO Publication QUESTION:

No problem, I will respect your wishes. The audio files of the interview will be stored digitally on my computer will be accessible only by me. The audio files will be destroyed in July 2010. Please feel free to ask any questions or concerns you may have at any time. Are you ready to begin?

IF “YES” TO BOTH QUESTIONS:

Thank you. The audio files of the interview will be stored digitally on my computer will be accessible only by me. The audio files will be destroyed in July 2010. Please feel free to ask any questions or concerns you may have at any time. Are you ready to begin?

--- INTERVIEW ---

FOLLOWING THE INTERVIEW:

(Participant), thank you once again for participating today, your contribution has been valuable. Do you have any questions or concerns at this time?

-- PAUSE for response (and answer if necessary) --

Here is my card. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this interview in the future, please contact me at the information on the card. You may also contact my faculty advisor, whose information I have written on the back of the card.

Thank you, and have a great day, (Participant)!

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VITA: Erika Polson

Employment

2007 – 2009, Instructor, The Pennsylvania State University
2005 – 2007, Teaching Assistant, The Pennsylvania State University
10/2002 – 8/2005, Marketing Director of Design Partnership of Cambridge, MA
2000 – 2002, Marketing Manager of Arthur D. Little, Inc., Cambridge, MA
2000, Marketing & PR of Hyannis Port Challenge for Best Buddies Int'l, Boston, MA
8/1998 – 12/1999, Teaching Assistant, Emerson College, Boston, MA

Education

Ph.D. The Pennsylvania State University, August 2009
M.A. Emerson College, Boston, MA, Dec. 1999
B.A. Oregon State University, March 1996

Publications

Polson, E. & Kahle, S. (forthcoming). "Limits of National Discourse on a Transnational Phenomenon: Britain, Immigration, and the 'Body' Politic." *International Communication Gazette*.

Conference Presentations

- Polson, E. (July 2008) "Portals of Globality: Styling the International 'Self'" presented at the 7th International Conference of the ACS Crossroads in Kingston, Jamaica
- Polson, E. (July 2008) "Emerging online: The International *I* and International *We*" presented at the annual conference of the IAMCR in Stockholm, Sweden
- Polson, E. & Kahle, S (November 2007). "Limits of National Discourse on a Transnational Phenomenon: Britain Confronts its New Body Politic" presented at the national conference of the NCA in Chicago **Awarded a "Top Student Paper"
- Polson, E. (July 2007). "World, meet World: Does Internet Enable a Change to the Media-Foreign Policy Monopoly?" presented at the annual conference of the IAMCR in Paris, France
- Polson, E. (July 2007). "Black Paris and the Virtual Africas: A Transhistorical Perspective on New Media and Diaspora" presented at the annual conference of the IAMCR in Paris, France
- Polson, E. (April 2007). "Postmodern antimodernism: The spectacle of the 'country store,'" presented at the Cultural Studies Association U.S. annual conference in Portland, OR