

AU PAIRS ON FACEBOOK: *Ethnographic use of social media in politicised fields*

Abstract

Ethnographers are increasingly making use of Facebook to acquire access and general acquaintance with their field of study. However, little has been written on how Facebook is used methodologically in research that does not have social media sites as the main focus of interest. This article argues that engagement with Facebook as a methodological tool can be useful in research among migrants in highly politicised fields. Pointing to a discursive construction of Filipina au pairs as victims of labour exploitation, the article shows how fieldwork on Facebook enables the exploration of the ways in which the au pairs resist and embrace such dominant representations, and on how such representations are ascribed different meanings in the transnational social fields of which the migrant are a part. The article is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2010 and 2014 in Denmark, the Philippines and on Facebook.

Keywords

Filipino migrants • au pairs • qualitative methods • Facebook • Denmark

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Introduction

This methodology article argues that incorporating Facebook in ethnographic fieldwork can open up for new pathways of knowledge in research among migrants whose presence in the migration destination is highly politicised. Taking a point of departure from the notion that researchers should be aware of the ways in which such migrants are represented in public debates, I suggest that the ethnographic use of social media can open new insights into how these migrants interpret, resist and embrace the dominant representations to which they are subjected. Communications on Facebook are particularly valuable in this regard, because the migrant's Facebook connections live within and beyond the borders of the migration destination, and the large part of this Facebook audience therefore has different understandings of the discourses that surround specific migrant categories in the destination society. The presence of Filipino au pairs in Denmark serves as one example of a politicised migration field. Au pair placement is a migration programme for young adult foreigners who officially are expected to learn about a new society by living temporarily with a host family. In the host families, the au pairs receive food, lodging and a monthly allowance of minimum DKK 4050 (€ 544)¹. In exchange, they are to perform between 18 and 30 hours of household chores weekly. Most au pairs in Denmark are women of Filipino origin who remit

large part of their income. However, despite the fact that they perform domestic work, they are not officially regarded as labourers by the Danish authorities. This situation has made way for intensive media debates on the issue of au pairing, and it has come to define specific ways in which these migrants are represented in the Danish public, as first and foremost labour-exploited women from the Global South.

Some of the most influential studies of au pairs in Scandinavia have viewed au pairing within the framework of domestic employment, which permits a focus on the economic and labour-exploitive dimensions of au pair migration (see, for example, Platzer 2002, Stenum 2008, Øien 2009). By questioning whether au pairing is about cultural exchange or cheap labour, such studies have concluded that cultural exchange is a mere side effect of au pair arrangements. These insightful works draw on earlier studies showing how European au pair programmes have turned au pairs into a cheap source of domestic labour (see, for example, Yodanis and Lauer 2005; Hess and Puckhaber 2004). While the awareness of labour-exploitive conditions are important, the tendency to approach the au pairs from the perspective of their work situation can also be approached as a form of 'gatekeeping' (cf. Appadurai 1986) that may limit research among specific migrant categories. As Olwig and Valentin (2015) argue, by primarily focusing on the exploitive conditions that migrants are subjected to, researchers

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can come to reinforce a negative image of the migrants as a 'racialized labor force performing the dirty, badly paid work that the local population is not willing to do' (Olwig and Valentin 2014:254). There is, however, a new wave within au pair research that aims at exploring other aspects of au pair migration than that which can be exhibited by employing a labour framework (see, for example, Búriková & Miller 2010, Dalgas 2015, Rohde 2012, Tkach 2014). My research aims to add to this body of literature.

This article argues that incorporating Facebook in ethnographic research can be useful in the pursuit of creating a more open research approach. In the case of my research, it gave access to information about the ways in which the au pairs negotiated their situation and the media representations they were subjected to. Moreover, together with a multi-sited ethnography offline, it made way for observations on the forms of success and empowerment these young migrants and their Philippine relations associate with au pair migration. Hence, insights revealed through research engagements on Facebook were developed in a dialectic move in which fieldwork offline informed my understanding of observations conducted online, just as observations conducted online were interpreted in lieu of insight gained through fieldwork among au pairs offline.

After examining the media discourses surrounding the au pairs in Denmark, the article discusses the au pairs' use of Facebook, and then draws on two cases where fieldwork engagements with this social media platform proved particularly informative in the examination of how the au pairs embraced and resisted these media discourses. One case addresses how au pairs discussed a documentary about au pairs, and the other case explores how the au pairs present their migration experience through the photos they display on Facebook. First, I will present my research methodology, and some of the ethical considerations relating to the use of Facebook as a methodological tool.

Methodology

The reflections on the use of Facebook as a methodological tool stems from my Ph.D. research about the long-term economic, geographical and social mobility trajectories of young Filipinos who migrate via the Danish au pair scheme. I conducted 10 months of ethnographic fieldwork in the Greater Copenhagen area of Denmark, and 10 weeks of fieldwork in the Philippines, mainly on the Visayan island of Bohol. The fieldwork entailed participant observation among au pairs and former au pairs, among family and friends of au pairs, and among participants at meetings and events arranged by Danish NGOs, such as the Au Pair Network and the Filipino Danish Group. I conducted 76 interviews of which 22 were with the family members left behind by au pairs and former au pairs. During most of these family interviews, I received help from former au pairs who acted as translators, since I have only limited knowledge of Tagalog. This language limitation also meant that on Facebook, I have only been able to read updates and comments in English, the au pairs' rare updates in Danish, and some of the writings in Taglish, a mixture of English and Tagalog.

Seventeen qualitative interviews were conducted with women working as au pairs, four with prospective au pairs and 17 with former au pairs, of whom nine were living in the Philippines. In the Philippines, I lived in the homes of au pair-sending families. In Copenhagen, the fieldwork mainly consisted of participant observation in social gatherings or informal meetings with interlocutors in public spaces.

Except for two au pair–host family households, my research has included au pairs and hosts from separate homes. Most of the au pairs I interviewed did not want their host families to know they had been talking to a researcher, let alone ask their host families' permission to invite me home. I refrained from establishing contact with au pairs through their host parents, suspecting that the au pairs might find it difficult to refuse to participate in my research if their hosts suggested they do so. Life-story interviews have been important starting points for the research, together with a focus on the different local and transnational social relations of individual au pairs. I received access to au pairs via the snowballing technique, and Facebook proved to be a central tool enabling me to access interlocutors in both Denmark and the Philippines.

The use of Facebook as a methodological tool requires continuous consideration of how the ethnographer presents herself on the social media site. A professional Facebook account – for example including the word 'anthropologist' in the Facebook name – would explicate the research purpose with the Facebook friendships. However, long-term ethnographic fieldwork involves deep engagement and personal investment in the lives of the interlocutors. Acknowledging the social exchange in this kind of relationship, I chose not to 'hide' myself under a professional profile. This choice came to demand some self-censorship when I, for example, avoided to expose my thoughts on certain political issues, fearing that this could risk to damage the rapport I had created with informants who had different points of view. However, the au pairs who aimed to keep secret that they informed a research project might have found their anonymity jeopardised if they connected to a professional researcher profile. I avoided to expose the identity of those interviewed by engaging in Facebook communication with a broader range of former and current au pairs in Copenhagen. In this way, my Facebook friends would not be able to identify interviewees based on who I communicated with on Facebook.

Data gathered through Facebook comes to inform the ethnographer's understanding of her interlocutors' social life, even if this data is not directly communicated to the researcher. I will show that this 'invisibility' creates opportunities for ethnographic research. However, it also aggravates the ethical challenges during the process of data gathering. Offline, the interlocutor is able to observe the ethnographer's presence during participant observation. On Facebook, interlocutors might not know if the researcher is online and thus present. Moreover, Facebook users (and researchers) can look through their Facebook friends' old posts, even when these friends are offline. Hence, the use of a personal Facebook profile demands that the ethnographer continuously emphasises her role as a researcher. I attempted to do so by writing private messages to new Facebook friends in which I explained that I used Facebook as a research tool. This was added to a note on how I used my Facebook profile as part of my ethnographic research, which I displayed in the 'about section' where Facebook users can describe themselves. Additionally, I exposed my research agenda by participating in Facebook debates and by occasionally posing specific and concrete questions related to my work in my status updates.

Some of the au pairs adjust their privacy settings on their Facebook profiles, giving different categories of Facebook friends different access to view their actions. Other au pairs have public profiles. While these are practically accessible for all Facebook users, the researcher cannot freely make use of their posts in academic works. As noted by Markham and Buchanan, 'People may operate in public spaces but maintain strong perceptions or expectations of privacy' (Markham and Buchanan 2012:6). It

requires the ethnographer's ongoing judgement to understand such expectations of privacy. In the process of dissemination, the ethnographer can additionally clarify expectations of privacy by using the private messaging function on Facebook to ask the interlocutor's permission to make use of specific observations, and to show the specific written contexts in which citations will appear. In this way, I have asked permission to present all the quotes from status updates that appears in this article.

Media representations: The au pair victim

Since the turn of the millennium, about 17,000 young Filipinos have come to Denmark on temporary au pair contracts (Grunnet 2008, Grunnet & Jensen 2013, Udlændingestyrelsen 2015). The au pair regulations do not entitle the au pairs to labour rights, assuming that the au pairs are safeguarded by their host families, i.e. the au pairs' employers. Moreover, since an au pair contract ties the au pair to a named host family, the regulations give the host families the power to end her legal residence if they terminate the contract prematurely. As Stenum (2008) shows, this creates a very vulnerable situation for the au pairs, and my observations point out that this vulnerability is aggravated because of the importance of the au pairs' remittances to the families back in Philippines.

All but two of the au pairs I have interviewed use their allowance to send regular remittances back home. The au pairs' Philippine families generally had sufficient sources to meet their subsistence needs, but were in need of additional income – from, for example, a family member abroad – to finance education, medical expenses or house repairs. Several au pairs have previous experience with domestic employment, and their journey should be understood within the context of the Philippine's 'culture of migration' (cf. Asis 2004) that has evolved as a consequence of large-scale labour migration from the country. Indeed, migration has had a significant impact on Philippine society economically, socially and in the ways that young Filipinos envisage their future. Hence, as other studies on Philippine migration have shown, economic matters are crucial but not the only motivating factor behind Filipino migration (see, for example, Aguilar 1999, McKay 2012, Miller & Madianou 2012).

The Philippine interest in the Danish au pair program gained speed after the year 2000, and by 2014, approximately 82% of the 1908 au pair permits issued were granted to Philippine citizens (Udlændingestyrelsen, 2015). Parallel to this development, au pairs increasingly became a subject of media interest. In a larger study on the Danish au pair scheme, the Danish National Centre for Social Research (SFI) presents a short overview of how au pair placement has been treated in the Danish media. In the report, it is argued that 'an important pivotal point in the media coverage has been the au pairs' negative experiences in affluent families who exploit them' (Liversage et al. 2013:75). This corresponds with my observations. These negative stories feed into a rather polarised public debate on the au pair situation. One side of the discussion presents au pair placement as a win-win situation that allows busy families to receive help at home and young Filipinos to earn a greater income than they could do back in the Philippines. As the former minister for development Søren Pind wrote on his Facebook page already in 2010, 'I am sure that this [au pairing] is one of the worlds' best forms of developmental aid'. This statement was cited in a range of newspaper articles (see, for example, Lehmann 2010, Vangkilde & Hvilsom 2010, Avisen.dk 2010). Especially, a liberal right-wing politician has supported this side of the debate, for example,

as shown by Stenum (2010: 38-40), by employing a political discourse that depict the employment of au pairs as a means to liberate Danish mothers. The other side of the debate, represented in a range of newspaper articles, voice intense criticism of the programme as giving way for labour exploitation of poor women from the Global South. Recently these articles have included the themes of overwork, withheld allowances, host families sharing an au pair, leaving to a double work burden, and the story of an au pair who lost her position after a work-related accident (Heinskou 2015, Kristensen 2014, Brandborg 2015).

Whereas the critique of the au pair program has exposed the au pairs' vulnerable positions in Danish society, it simultaneously enforces the representation of these migrants as primarily victims with little agency of their own. One example is, when Filipinos are explained to be *forced* abroad by poverty (Madsen 2014), thereby disregarding the aspects of choice, courage and agency that au pair migration might entail. Another form of victim construction is evoked when journalists, politicians and readers commenting on the digital news articles occasionally use a slave analogy to describe the au pairs' situation. One example of this is a feature article published by the newspaper Politiken, in which four social democratic politicians conclude that 'on equal footing' [au pair] now has become a master-slave relationship (Klint et al. 2014).

What is striking here is how specific migrant categories become part of politicised fields and the ways in which they are subjected to specific dominant representations. There has, for example, been a tendency to represent other migrant categories (mostly Muslim and non-Western) as 'criminals' in the Danish media (Hervik, 1999, Madsen, 2000). In comparison, the Filipino au pairs are mainly described with sympathy, as the victims of poverty at the hands of greedy host families and of a labour-exploitative scheme of migration. Since 97% of the au pairs are women (Liversage et al. 2013:92), we need to take into consideration the gendered dimension of this representation. Despite what we can call the criminalisation of Muslim minorities, there is a tendency in the media to depict Muslim women as victims as well. In a study of 1600 newspaper articles, journalist Deniz Serinci (2013) shows how the media tends to portrait Muslim women as victims of repression and social control. It is thus a different form of victimhood than that offered to the au pairs, as they are subject to dominant representations that concern labour exploitation, in particular. In the polarised media debates described above, both those positive of au pairing and those opposing this form of migration tend to define the labour dimension of au pairing as the quintessential theme when concerned with these migrants. Indeed, the working conditions and income levels are central issues for the au pairs. However, these issues only display a partial picture of how these young migrants view their European journeys. The media coverage and the public debates on au pairing has shown little interest towards, for example, how the young migrants view their time in Europe as a unique opportunity to travel, the forms of self-making that the au pairs associate with their migration and the values they ascribe to being important family providers.

Au pairs on Facebook

The construction of au pairs as exploited labour migrants has created some hesitation among au pairs and NGOs regarding their engagement with researchers. One of the forums that are involved in the situation of au pairs in Denmark is the Philippine women's organization Babaylan Denmark. In their handbook for au pairs (and

host families), the Babaylan Denmark dedicates a section in which they explain about their experience of informing researchers and journalists on the issue of au pairing. As journalists and researchers, according to Babaylan, generally failed to distinguish between domestic work and au pairing, Babaylan had experienced that when speaking to researchers and journalists, their statements had become re-interpreted to accommodate the pre-defined research questions and point of view of the interviewers. Hence, in their handbook for au pairs, Babaylan Denmark writes: 'We are grateful for the invitation to participate in [research] projects, but in the end, we know that our interviews are re-interpreted as they come under the researcher's lens, and so our attempt to communicate is mediated by others who have their own perspectives and frameworks' (Babaylan 2013:10). Another important actor is the au pair group under the trade union *Fag og Arbejde* (FOA, Trade and Labor), which aims to better the situation of au pairs by virtue of their role as labour migrants. It was a third larger actor in the Danish au pair field, the community around the Catholic Church Saint Anne in Copenhagen, which came to serve as an important entry point for my fieldwork when I participated in a Catholic youth camp organized by Saint Anne's Young Adults (SAYA). The youth camp lasted three days and was located in a countryside scout house where members of the SAYA engaged in social activities, such as worshipping and religious workshops.

Almost all participants in the SAYA are Filipinos who are in Denmark as au pairs. SAYA advertised its different public events through an open Facebook group, and it was through this site that I was able to communicate with the camp's organisers, who permitted me to participate in the camp as a researcher. Initially, I had not planned to engage with Facebook as part of my fieldwork, and I was just starting to become acquainted with the site for my personal use. However, at the camp I understood that Facebook was important for the au pairs, as the organisers had made an effort to create a physical image of Facebook at the camp. They called it 'Faithbook', written on a huge banner in the same blue font used by Facebook. Under this banner, all participants had a paper 'wall' resembling a 'Facebook wall', with posts – videos, photos, statements or links to other Internet documents – displayed by either the owner of the wall or posted by the owner's Facebook friends. Imitating such personal virtual walls, SAYA's Faithbook paper pages enabled messages to be written on the walls of others, and, resembling the private message function on Facebook, small envelopes attached to the walls allowed individuals to leave private messages to each other.

Facebook is a very popular social media platform in the Philippines. All the au pairs I acquainted had a Facebook account prior to their arrival in Denmark, and normally au pairs receive a laptop with Internet access in their host family homes. They use Facebook as a tool to remain in contact with Philippine relations at home and abroad. Several au pairs also told me about making new acquaintances through Facebook, and they used the social media site as a tool to re-create Copenhagen-based friendship ties, when they organised and remembered events, such as sleepovers and parties during their free weekends. Facebook is a crucial social platform because the au pairs have limited possibilities to engage in social life outside their host family homes. From Monday to Friday, the au pairs' workdays generally involve chores in the mornings and afternoons, which make it difficult to socialise outside the host family home. Most au pairs live in the suburbs north of Copenhagen and thus need public transport to see their friends during their leisure time. However, public transport is costly in Denmark, and going to the city for just a few hours is rarely an option

for au pairs who aim to remit as much of their earnings as possible. Hence, they use Facebook to affirm their social connections with others, giving 'likes' to other Facebook users and receiving them back. Through conversations with au pairs and my participation in Facebook activities with the au pairs, I found that they also engage in video calls and chats, which can be between a group of users or between two Facebook friends. The au pairs also communicate when posting and commenting on photos and music videos, as well as by playing different Facebook-based games with each other. Such social actions can be done sporadically, such as during a five-minute break from vacuuming or during the hours of rest before the second round of chores starts.

When the au pairs write a status update or post links to an Internet document, they invite Facebook friends, in Denmark and abroad, to discuss the posts in a thread of comments. This highlights the transnational dimension of the social platform. This social media site is used within the framework of polymedia (Miller and Madianou 2012) as it interacts with other forms of communication through, for example, Skype, telephone conversations and SMS texting. Collective Facebook chats with siblings in various countries can be organized via SMS, remittances are usually accompanied by a telephone conversation in which the au pair can prioritise the money sent, and receivers of the au pairs' gifts can display their gratefulness with photos on Facebook. A central affordance with Facebook is its role as a news vehicle when au pairs post and discuss various news items. Thus, current political debates (in the Philippines, Denmark and abroad) that au pairs find important have often initially come to my attention through Facebook. In its function as a news vehicle, Facebook becomes a way for prospective and current au pairs to gain knowledge about changing rules and regulations from the Philippine consulate and the Danish authorities concerning au pair placement. Moreover, they use the Facebook sites of various NGOs to raise questions concerning their rights and duties or to find new host families in case of a premature termination of the au pair contract or, of continued au pair migration, for example, to Norway.

As Murthy observes, engaging in research via social networking sites can 'result in increased inclusion for those with disabilities (mobility and otherwise)' (Murthy, 2008:845). For the au pairs, a major constraint is the way they are bound to their host families' homes. For my research, a main obstacle was the difficulty of conducting participant observation among au pairs who spent their weekdays in homes I could not enter. Facebook, however, became a significant meeting point. These Facebook friendships became openings through which I could ask for interviews and offline meetings, or engage in chats and longer e-mail correspondences. Moreover, through my participation in the au pairs' social realm on Facebook, I became acquainted with the different connections between the au pairs in the Copenhagen area. I learned about events that I had not been able to attend, as when au pairs party at weddings and birthdays, when they engage in sport tournaments or beauty contests, or when a group of friends accompanies an au pair to the airport after she has finished her contract.

Facebook discussions

The social media site opened a window to exploring how au pairs discussed the conditions they were living in. This was particularly informative in relation to the recurrent stories in the Danish media of individual Filipinos who had experienced hardships during their time in Denmark. In my conversations with au pairs, some did tell

me about experiences of exploitation and indifference on the part of their hosts, while others reported being pleased with their lives in the Danish families. Media representations of au pairs rarely show a differentiated perspective on these experiences. Facebook had a central role in enabling me to raise questions about how the au pairs negotiated their working and living conditions, as I could follow how au pairs debated such issues with each other. This was particularly the case when au pairs discussed how they were represented in the documentary *Au pair*, broadcast on the main Danish public television channel in the winter of 2011.

This documentary focused on the pressures these young women encounter in trying to send enough money to their families back home while only receiving pocket money from their Danish host families. Eager to stay in Europe, one au pair agreed with a prospective host to work more than the 30 hours weekly the contract allows for, another had – against the rules – a child back home that she did not tell her host family about and yet another struggled to collect enough money to finance her mother's cancer treatment. By displaying video footage of au pairs doing domestic work and of emotional conversations with family members at home, the documentary showed the story of au pairs as young labour migrants dealing with painful family separations and financial problems. Thus, the documentary spoke to the dominant representation of au pairs in the Danish media as poor women from the Global South being exploited as underpaid domestic workers by affluent Northern employers.

Following this broadcast, discussions on the documentary took place on the Facebook walls of several au pairs. In one of them, an au pair wrote,

'3 different stories of an au pair. The documentary showed how we face life outside our homeland. The fact is, most of the au pairs work for the sake of their family and not for their own sake. That's Filipino: "we really love our family".'

This view was popular. Expressing a perception of Filipinos as a particularly family-loving people, the statement received 22 likes and 18 comments from other au pairs, generally concentrating on the sacrifice that Filipinos make abroad for their families back home. As one au pair expressed it, 'I would rather face more and more trials and sacrifices (...) we work because we love'. I have noticed this idiom of sacrifice in conversations during my fieldwork in the Philippines and in the life-story interviews I have conducted among current and former au pairs in Denmark. A sacrifice, by definition, must include hardships. Surely, numerous accounts of au pairs do contain stories of difficulties abroad. The focus on au pairs' hardships that were portrayed in the documentary not only reflected the victimisation of au pairs in the Danish debates and advocacy discourses, but also spoke to the representations of migrant domestic workers as self-sacrificing subjects in Philippine discourses, and, as the Facebook discussions showed, among the au pairs themselves. However, not all au pairs agreed entirely with this view. In a long Facebook update, one of those who had participated in the documentary actually pointed to a somewhat different understanding of what it means to be au pair. She wrote:

'I never had the feeling that I was at a disadvantage in terms of work and such because I didn't allow it. My hosts treated me as an equal, as an educated person who, while needing to support a sister, also is interested in the world around her [. . .] being an au pair is not at all bad. If only you know where you stand and have the courage to fight for it'.

The quotation above is part of a longer statement in which the au pair argued that au pairs should refrain from presenting

themselves as 'servants' to their hosts. Rather, she suggested that it was a major problem when au pairs could not find the courage to decline to conduct more chores than their contracts required. The reluctance to say 'no' is a recurrent theme among au pairs on Facebook. It is part of ongoing discussions of whether au pairs are migrant workers or, as stated in their contracts, young people on cultural exchange with limited obligations in their host families. Many au pairs show an ability to navigate between these two positions. Most identify themselves with overseas Filipino workers, who are celebrated as heroes of the Philippine nation and acknowledged for the sacrifices they are making abroad. However, there are also tendencies among the au pairs to explicitly distance themselves from being positioned as domestic employees. One au pair, for example, posted a status update in which she encouraged other au pairs to use words as 'home chores' and 'allowance' instead of 'work' and 'salary'. Correspondingly, another au pair distanced her role from that of an employee by writing 'I am not your cheap maid' in a status update that described a quarrel she had had with her host. In such statements, the au pairs did not present themselves as completely powerless in relation to their situation in Denmark. Rather, they expressed awareness of their rights and conscious pursuits of negotiating the role they attained as au pairs.

The reflexivity these young migrants display about their roles as au pairs rarely receives attention when Danish media represents them as vulnerable subjects. However, when the au pairs applauded the TV documentary for describing how they face life abroad and how they are not working for their own sake, they do create a narrative of suffering that corresponds well with the documentary's representation of au pairs as victims. Nevertheless, I suggest that we are dealing with a somewhat different construction of victimhood, and that we cannot just view the au pairs' narratives within an interpretive framework that is specific to Denmark. Through participant observation in the Philippines and among au pairs in Denmark, I am able to contextualise how au pairs express their trials and sacrifices in relation to understandings regarding migration in Philippine society. This discourse of sacrifice relates to ideas of martyrdom, which, according to McKay (2012:54), is one of the fundamental themes of postcolonial Philippine society. Hence, from a Philippine perspective, the au pairs' sacrifices entail a strong sense of agency – their travel abroad is a conscious act enabling them to help those at home – and this seemingly selfless act of migration actually speaks to ideas of heroism connected to being an overseas Filipino. Indeed, to get through the trials they face abroad provides a path to social recognition and status in the au pairs' home communities (see Dalgas, 2015).

The different perspectives on the Facebook debates that followed the TV documentary point to the necessity of interpreting actions on Facebook within the realm of the interlocutors' offline worlds, whether the au pair is writing for an audience in the Philippines or in Denmark. Facebook is not a site that exists in itself. Rather, as Miller argues, 'each place produces the internet that we find there' (Miller, 2011:xiii). As I have shown above, understanding the way the au pairs discussed their living conditions on Facebook thus required some knowledge about how migration is perceived in the au pairs' society of origin. In this way, engaging with Facebook as a tool and as a platform for ethnographic research becomes a dialectic move; our understanding of data collected through Facebook requires knowledge of our interlocutors' social worlds offline, but simultaneously our understanding of these offline worlds becomes informed by the data we collect through Facebook.

Facebook images: the successful au pair

Self-presentation is central to the use of Facebook, whether it happens through likes, political statements or photos that show persons, images and things the user finds important. Such self-presentation happens towards a variety of audiences, and this, I suggest, might prove methodologically fruitful. Some au pairs have more than a thousand Facebook friends. These are not only located in the Philippines or Denmark, highlighting the fact that the au pairs are in the middle of transnational social fields that do not just encompass their societies of origin and destination. Hence, in aiming to employ a transnational perspective on migration, engagement with Facebook can allow ethnographers to observe how interlocutors present themselves and communicate with friends and relatives in various parts of the world simultaneously. I am not assuming that Facebook can provide thorough insights into the full scope of such communication, but it can point to some aspects of these transnational social lives that speak to and inform data gathered through interviews and participant observation outside the Facebook realm.

One example of this is my observations of the photos the au pairs display on Facebook. When the Facebook user chooses which photos to display, it is a self-conscious act that makes it possible to reflect on how he or she wants to be seen by others. Hence, the photos can point towards what kinds of personas our interlocutors present themselves to be or to have become. Friends and family in the Philippines are important audiences for these images, and some au pairs even use Facebook as a virtual photo album that allows relatives located far away to comment on and follow events in their lives. I suggest that exactly because the ethnographer is not the main audience for these self-presentations, it can open up for new perspectives on the interlocutor's social lives.

Several of the au pairs' photos are taken in front of tourist attractions in Copenhagen, Paris or Rome, in front of castles in Germany or on hiking trips in the Scandinavian nature. With these, the au pairs express the adventurous aspects of their time in Europe. This corresponds with a recurrent theme in the au pairs' narratives, namely that of enlisting in au pair migration as a way to 'see the world'. Another category of photos shows cash, new smart phones or fashionable clothes bought abroad, and thus exhibits an attractive economic position for primarily those at home. Other photos portray caring situations with the host family's children or gifts that the au pair has received from her host parents, and by displaying these, the au pairs communicate a warm social bond developed with their hosts. These photos, thus, relate to migration as a pathway to specific notions of personal success that I have identified in the narratives of prospective au pairs in the Philippines and among former au pairs residing in Denmark.

Analysing physical photographs that circulate between Filipino migrants in Hong Kong and their home village of Haliap, McKay has examined how photographs 'inform the expectations of others' (McKay, 2008:382). The photograph, she argues, has the potentiality of 'creating future selves', though photographs also set 'their subjects a challenge of becoming more like the subjects they portray' (ibid.). From this perspective, the au pairs' display of success is also a form of self-presentation that informs the audience how they have been able to get the most out of their migration opportunity. While these photos relate to the expectations of self-development that these migrants associate with au pairing, they also influence the potential that prospective migrants associate with migration and the expectations from those left behind that the

au pairs aim to fulfill during their time abroad. Such expectations are sometimes unrealistically high. In one case, four au pairs, who were cousins from the same village, chose to coordinate their vacation home so that they could help each other in meeting the financial requests from their relatives.

The strong interest in the vulnerable positions that au pairs occupy in their host families' homes and destination societies gives little room for reflection on how au pairs may achieve empowerment through their migration. Observing how au pairs present themselves on Facebook as successful and enjoying life abroad can make possible a perspective on their migration experience that goes beyond their roles as low paid and unrecognised labourers. Indeed, it strengthened my ability to raise questions about other aspects of their lives. This does not mean that the au pairs' displays of success on Facebook should be taken at face value: certainly, they aim to give a positive image of themselves when they post their portraits and tell about their consumption habits. However, if we regard photos on Facebook as a display of how our interlocutors like to be seen by others, it can add a degree of nuance to dominant public discourses surrounding migrants in politicised fields. Moreover, I suggest that incorporating Facebook methodologically in ethnographic research is fruitful in the aspiration of looking beyond frameworks of gatekeeping (Appadurai, 1986:357) that 'limits anthropological theorizing' (not about the place but about the persons who inhabit a particular mode of migrating), and therefore comes to 'define the quintessential and dominant questions of interest'. In the case of the au pairs, the manner in which they presented themselves on Facebook surely went far beyond both the dominant constructions of au pairs as exploited labourers, as well as the media discourse constructing these migrants as victims with little agency of their own.

Conclusions

To an increasing extent, ethnographers are including Facebook as a research tool to acquire both access and general acquaintance with their sites of study. In aiming to approach the life-worlds of our interlocutors holistically, it is significant, as Garcia et al. note (2009:52), that the offline and online worlds are becoming increasingly merged. Nevertheless, little has been written on how Facebook can be used methodologically as a research tool. Thus, as Murthy points out (2008:845), awareness of the potentialities of social networking sites in social research is lagging far behind. In this article, I have argued that one potential of using Facebook as a methodological tool lies in its ability to help researchers explore and look beyond conceptual frameworks of gatekeeping and dominant public discourses that surround interlocutors who find themselves in highly politicised fields. This potential grows from a situation where the individual interlocutor on Facebook engages with a broad and heterogeneous social forum, and it opens up for reflections on how the interlocutors online and offline worlds merges through the social media platform. This encourages an ethnography that combines insights from fieldwork conducted offline and online. My observations of how the au pairs presented themselves on Facebook, for example, made me aware of how the notions of personal success also appeared in my data stemming from participant observation, informal conversations and offline interviews. Using Facebook in ethnographic fieldwork in this way becomes a dialectical move in which data gathered offline is necessary in order to contextualize online observations, while these offline engagements also become informed by observations carried out online.

When an au pair with more than a thousand Facebook friends within and beyond the Philippines posts a status update on her Facebook page, she communicates simultaneously to a culturally heterogeneous social forum. For the au pairs, these audiences were sited in a geographically dispersed field in which the au pair's migration to Denmark was ascribed with different meanings. Hence, fieldwork on Facebook provided insights to how the au pairs express their roles to a heterogeneous audience, in terms of a negotiation of their positions as, on the one hand being young people on cultural exchange with limited work obligations, while on the other hand being labourers who sacrifice themselves to sustain their families financially from afar. I have shown how this resonates with the ways in which au pairs are construed as victims in the Danish media and public debates, while this sacrifice, from a Philippine perspective, also is endowed with pride and agency.

While the heterogeneity of the Facebook audience is a great affordance for ethnographic fieldwork, it also brings with it ethical challenges. Facebook users intend that their actions on Facebook are observed and commented upon in the specific forums in which they are laid out. Still, when interlocutors sit in their home and post a picture, a status update or a comment on Facebook, they are not always conscious about the fact that their actions can become subject for anthropological analysis. Hence, when conducting fieldwork on Facebook the ethnographer must expose her presence as a researcher to an even higher extent than when, for example, conducting participant observation in larger social gatherings offline. The balance is for the ethnographer to make herself visible without jeopardising the interlocutors right to remain anonymous. Not all my Philippine Facebook friends have been actively involved in my research, so by viewing my Facebook account it would not be possible to identify my research participants. However, as noted, many of the au pairs I have interviewed also did not want their host families – and possibly other relations – to know that they had been interviewed. In the quest of making myself visible, I could not simply raise research questions directed to specific Facebook friends or point to earlier interviews in public Facebook communication. The private messaging system therefore becomes important in terms of exposing oneself as an ethnographer, for example by asking specific questions to the interlocutor's Facebook updates. In addition, during the phase of dissemination, the private messaging system provides an easy and swift way to ask permission to represent data from an interlocutor's Facebook activities.

When working with informants who spend a considerable amount of their time on social media, these platforms become useful meeting grounds in the process of approaching interlocutors as well as in opening up for new modes of interpretation. Studying among

geographically mobile subjects, such as migrants who travel around on temporary contracts, Facebook also provides an opportunity to remain in contact with the interlocutors during longer time spans. In my research, this opened up for observations of the different social, economic and geographical trajectories of the interviewed au pairs, which I could explore further through interviews on Skype, telephone or during offline meetings. This ability to remain in contact despite geographical distances is also central to how the au pairs use Facebook. Hence, by using Facebook as a methodological tool, the ethnographer can use the same communication channels as the interlocutors are using, and it opens for a path to create and maintain relations with informants. The incorporation of Facebook in ethnographic fieldwork can thus come to strengthen the centripetal forces that pull the ethnographer into the field (cf. Bourdieu, 1993), and this to an extent, where it can come to aggravate the challenges related to leaving the field again. Indeed, when the ethnographer enters the interlocutors' social worlds on Facebook, she simultaneously – when using a personal profile – invites the interlocutors into her own social Facebook space.

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Notes

1. During the time of fieldwork, the minimum au pair allowance was set to between DKK 3000 (€ 403) and DKK 3150 (€ 423).
2. For a similar overview on newspaper articles that during 2010 and 2011 focused on the exploitation of au pairs, see Liversage et al. 2013.
3. In Danish, "På lige fod" er blevet til et herre- og slaveforhold" (Klint et al. 2014).

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