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Research as an Act of Love: Ethics, Émigrés, and the Praxis of Becoming Human

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RESEARCH

Research as an Act of Love: Ethics, Émigrés, and the Praxis of Becoming Human

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Conceptual in nature, this paper revisits the debate on the nature and ethical implication of what it means to conduct research with/in immigrant communities. The view from "inside" is different from the view from "'outside," I am contending, and both are mediated by what I am calling *I–Thou Research Ethics*. This is an Ethics that places émigrés as our neighbors, engineers, doctors, etc. Mexico now lives next door, I am arguing, and Mexicans are now hyphenated: Mexican-Americans (for example). Gilles Deleuze (2005) refers to this as "post-identity phenomenon." To deal with it, I shall (a) discuss its ethics through The Stephen Tyler Affair (hooks, 1990); (b) build an "I–Thou Research Ethics" as a response to this Affair; and (c) conclude with a genuine dialogue in which research becomes an act of love, and "researcher–researched" becomes an "'I–Thou relationship." Only then can we hope for the transformative praxis of becoming human.

The view from the inside and the view from the outside when it comes to research, ethics, and methodology is a central contention of this article. I am not approaching it from the classic, modernist sense of inside(r) and outside(r), but within a poststructural framework mediated by what I am calling *I–Thou Research Ethics*. Central to this Ethics is a required deep understanding that, thanks to the facilitation of migratory ideas, technologies, and people, émigrés are no longer in India, China, Sénégal, Central Africa, Chili, or Venezuela. They are next door; they are our neighbors, taxi drivers, shopkeepers, and, if your imagination is not colonized, they are our doctors, engineers, and university professors. Mexico now lives next door, and Mexicans are now hyphenated: Mexican-Americans. "Welcome to post-identity!" as Gilles Deleuze (2005) would have put it. To deal with this postidentity, I shall discuss its ethics by (re)introducing bell hooks's (1990) discussion of Stephen Tyler's picture, which I am calling, modestly and

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maybe not unproblematically, "The Stephen Tyler Affair." Stephen Tyler is the anthropologist who, despite his best intentions, ends up colonizing. To colonize, etymologically, is to make another place one's own, without regard for settlement or original occupiers. The anthropologist does so, hooks argues, not by physical occupation but through the knowledge he produces, through writing his own imagination of what he sees. The I–Thou Research Ethics is built in relation to this and as a response to it. This Ethics is articulated at a philosophical and conceptual level but has broad methodological implications, especially when it comes to conducting research with immigrant communities—the category under investigation for this special issue. It requires a different language in which "research" becomes "dialogue," a genuine conversation and an act of love; "researcher–research participant relationship" is turned into an "I–Thou relationship"; and, finally, we conduct research *with* (not in) immigrant communities. Here, I am contending, the distinction between insider and outsider is both problematic and absolutely necessary. Insiders, it must be noted, have a nuanced understanding of immigrant communities that outsiders do not. To contend that this is not universally true, that is to say, not *all* insiders have the same nuanced understanding of their own communities, is tautological. Of course, no two people have the "same" understanding, whatever the issue might be, but their common linguistic, cultural, social, and historical backgrounds would allow for a deeper and perhaps a different understanding than outsiders. It is this different understanding that *appoints* them as witnesses for their own lives, as *strong poets* who need to write vigilant, critical, and visionary verses that we have not yet heard. Only then, I conclude, can we hope for transformative and genuine dialogue.

AN ECONOMY OF PARTIAL TRUTHS: YET, BECOMING A SHADOW IN IT

In his introduction to *Writing Culture*, James Clifford (1985) writes that, "Ethnographic truths are . . . inherently partial—committed and incomplete" (p. 7). This is clearly the case in all forms of research (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008). Yet, as bell hooks (1990) had shown, these partial truths are not so partial after all. Even in the space of partial truths, hooks (1990) argues, some truths are not only made more significant, but they are presented and represented as worthy of writing and thinking about, thanks to power and privilege. They are thus universalized. She/He who writes, it seems, has always the possibility of slipping back into her/his own image, hence, writing about her/himself in the process. Writing in this context is about "the making of texts" (Clifford, 1985, p. 2), the making of truths, and, eventually, the making of people. Here, as Nietzsche (n.d.) would have put it, we are clearly not talking about interpretation, meaning, or even truth itself. We are talking about the intervention of power in closing its multiple interpretations. Unfortunately, when it comes to research, writing is heretofore "reduced to method: keeping good field notes, making accurate maps, 'writing up' results" (Clifford, 1985, p. 2), and the researched is reduced to an object of study: a background shadow against which theory is made. The researched thus becomes a collective that is arranged, a tableau that is drawn, a "strange" that is made familiar, and a space where theory is tested. This is perfectly illustrated by bell hooks' (1990) discussion of what I am calling The Stephen Tyler Affair.

What I am calling The Stephen Tyler Affair was not like the Sokal Affair, nor something that shook the academy to its core, and it certainly did not overthrow the colonizing nature of classic anthropology and social science in general. The Sokal Affair is worthy of remembrance. Alan Sokal, a physics professor at New York University, sent an article to *Social Text*, a postmodern

cultural studies journal, in 1996. The article was a hoax to test whether such a journal would pub-lish an article "liberally salted with nonsense if it (a) sounded good and (b) flattered the editors' ideological preconceptions" (Sokal, 1996, n.p.). The article was published and the result was a historical debate on: scholarly merit, the relation between the humanity and (natural) sciences, the influence of postmodern philosophy, academic ethics, peer-review, intellectual rigor, and pseudo-science. At first glance, one may argue that it is immodest to call or compare the Sokal Affair with The Stephan Tyler Affair. For it is precisely this obscure, insidious, and "banal" (Billing, 1995) nature of Stephen Tyler, as we shall see, that I am calling it an "affair" (see also Merelman, 1995).

The Stephen Tyler Affair is indeed about a picture on a cover of a book. The picture is of Stephen Tyler of the Anthropology Department of Rice University, and the book is *Writing Culture*, an edited anthology by James Clifford and George Marcus (1985). The picture was taken in 1963 while Tyler was doing fieldwork in India. As hooks (1990) describes it:

> One sees in this image a white male sitting at a distance from darker-skinned people, located behind him; he is writing. Initially fascinated by the entire picture, I begin to focus my attention on specific details. Ultimately I fix my attention on the piece of cloth that is attached to the writer's glasses, presumably to block out the sun; it also blocks out a particular field of vision. [For hooks,] this "blindspot," artificially created, is a powerful visual metaphor for the ethnographic enterprise as it has been in the past and as it is being rewritten . . . [Behind Tyler, who is sitting on a bed, is an Indian man. H]e is visually separated from family, kin, community, his gaze turned away from them . . . [Behind this man is a shadow where faintly one sees a "brown" woman and a child.] The face of the brown/black woman is covered up, written over by the graphics which tell readers the title of the book and its authors. Anyone who glances at this cover notes that the most visible body and face, the one that does not have to be searched for, is the white male image. (pp. 127–128)

hooks (1990) concludes thus: "Perhaps to the observer trained in ethnography and anthropology this cover documents a very different history and vision from the one I see. I look at it and I see visual metaphors of colonialism, of domination, of racism" (p. 128).

What is troubling for hooks is not only the neutral ways in which the picture was dealt with and celebrated by the editors, but the symbolism invoked by it, especially when it is intersected with race, gender, and ethnography (and I take ethnography here as a metaphor representing the question of methodology). Described almost as a perfect illustration of how an "authorial presence" might look, James Clifford writes in his introduction that,

> Our frontispiece shows Stephen Tyler . . . at work in India in 1963. The ethnographer is absorbed in writing—taking dictation? Fleshing out an interpretation? recording an important observation? dash-ing off a poem? Hunched over in the heat, he has draped a wet cloth over his glasses. His expression is obscured. An interlocutor looks over his shoulder—with boredom? patience? amusement? In this image the ethnographer hovers at the edge of the frame—faceless, almost extraterrestrial, a hand that writes. (Clifford, 1985, p. 1)

For Clifford, this is not "the usual portrait of anthropological fieldwork. We are more accustomed to pictures of Margaret Mead exuberantly playing with children in Manus or questioning villagers in Bali," he explains. Here, "Participant-observation, the classic formula for ethnographic work, leaves little room for texts" (p. 1). For bell hooks (1990), however, and as a visual and cultural reader who is conscious of the politics of race and imperialism, she is quite "conscious of the concrete whiteness and maleness," and the picture "is anything but extraterrestrial" (p. 127).

Symbolically, the picture does three things. First, it obliterates any notion of subjectivity in which brown and black bodies can speak. Similar to Gayatri Spivak (2008), hooks was asking "Can the subaltern speak?" Both for hooks and Spivak (among so many others), the subaltern is still "talked about" and "discovered." Here, "indigenous ethnographers" (read insiders) who enter "cultures where they resemble the people they are studying and writing about" (hooks, 1990, p. 126) are not given any (or enough) attention.

Second, hooks adds, there is something symbolically unsettling about how "the brown man" was represented. Being in the middle between "the ethnographer" and his family, he acted as a mediator who subtly may "desire" the "authorial power" of the White man. His gaze, hooks writes, is "visually separated from his family," and his gaze is "turned away from them" (p. 127). Finally, but very significantly, "the brown woman" is not only silent and silenced, but she does not have a gaze. She and her gaze are doubly erased, doubly annihilated: "first by the choice of picture where the dark woman is in the shadows, and secondly by a demarcating line" (p. 127). In fact, her gaze is veiled by the graphics of the cover where a black line is drawn across her face.

My revisit to bell hooks' analytic reading, which is now more than twenty years old, is by no means meant to be a suggestion that there is a lack of contemporary scholarship problematizing and thinking through the role and ethics of the researcher in social sciences. Recently, Kathleen Gallagher (2008) has done us a great favor in comprehensively collecting essays on the ethics of research in, among others, the fields of education, anthropology, sociology, political science, and international relations.

There are two primary reasons for revisiting bell hooks' reading from 1990. First, because this reading triggered a whole field of research known in antiracism as "everyday racism"—that deictic, banal, unnoticeable, and naturalized racism (see especially Essed, 1991; Smith, 2010). Second, I am referring to hooks' reading precisely because it is not a whiz-bang kind of affair like Sokal. For this reason, however, some may question whether it deserves the term *affair*. For me, bell hooks is one of the first scholars who, genealogically (Foucault, 2009), made us pause and think through this "deictic racism" (Smith, 2012). The hooks reading is invoked here, in sum, to demonstrate my argument that insiders, as I hope to show below, have a "third eye," a nuanced and layered reading that outsiders do not have. Clifford, one of most critical anthropologists, thought nothing of Stephen Tyler's picture. In fact, he thought it represented a different, complicated, and postcolonial type of anthropology and anthropologist. Sometimes, one many contend, it takes a postcolonial subject to do a postcolonial reading.

When it comes to research ethics, for me, the lessons learned from The Stephen Tyler Affair in sum are: first, as we attempt to rethink research ethics and politics, especially *with* immigrant communities, it is important to reexamine and remake research in ways that do not disadvantage, colonize, or perpetuate what we already know about the plight of minoritized communities; second, researchers whose bodies are historically allied with (racial, class, and gender) privilege (among others) should be cautious, wary, and vigilant about the kind of knowledge their bodies produce, that is, the impact of their historical and subject location on the conclusions they reach because they cannot talk about what they do not know; third, intentions do not matter in a context like The Stephen Tyler Affair because, whether he wants to or not, Tyler's picture is deeply historical and is read in a particular way; (one might thus conclude, intentions matter only in their final effects, in how they make people feel and in how they are read); fourth, and finally, we need a radical politics of representation, one in which indigenous researchers are at the center of what it means to pose "questions at the boundaries of civilizations, cultures, classes, races, and genders"

and to decode and recode and to tell "the grounds of collective order and diversity, inclusion, and exclusion" (Clifford, cited in hooks, 1990, p. 126).

Researching (with) immigrant communities, one might argue, therefore, has the extra ethical layer of history, colonization, and hegemony. That is to say, the care researchers need to display, especially outsiders, when working with immigrant communities, comes from the long history of exclusion when immigrant communities are silenced (Lee, 2009), their stories are told by others—usually scholars who claim objectivity and so-called rigorous academic standard, and their internal complexity is reduced to typologies, models, or statistical numbers. Here, the subaltern will speak only when three conditions are met. First, the subaltern will speak when we move from the idea of researched to subjects. Modernistically framed, researched are meant to be known, discovered, risked being rendered without perspective, thus always vulnerable. On the other hand, inherent in subject is both subjectivity and agency: two central elements that enable the speech act. Second, we will speak when the notion of the expert is de-centered to mean the research subject and not the expert in its traditional academic sense. Indigenous people know (in the sense of being experts on their own lives) and not simply *know about* (in the academic sense of being expert about something, an area of specialization). Third, and finally, the subaltern will speak when we move from fear to dialogue because dialogue, as I discuss below, invests research with potential to decolonize the future. Here, the very term research is hyphenated—re-search —to question and search *anew*; whereas fear works to perpetuate power relations in which the so-called academic experts *write* and *name* the researched and, more importantly, *write* and *zone* society itself in the known, not-known, and to-be-known. Here, empiricism (be it statistics, numbers, graphs—"data") operates as a cover behind which the researcher hides her/his history, subjectivity, power, interpretation, colonial gaze, and hegemony. This is why, given certain forms of institutional power structure in which researchers always have the potential of becoming "big brothers," *informed consent* does not mean carte blanche and, therefore, has to be approached with mindfulness of this history of colonialism and hegemony. These express my reasons for why I am calling for a radical research ethics, one where scholarship does not become another mechanism of marginalization, hegemony, and colonization. Discussed later, I want to term this radical research ethics: "I–Thou Research Ethics."

Before doing so, however, the idea of the insider and the outsider should not be taken for granted nor unproblematically approached. Ever since Weber developed his idea of *verstehen* (or understanding), wherein the researcher "needs to empathize with the group under study, to try and put themselves in their shoes, in order to gain rich understanding of the motives and values of the study group" (MacRae, 2007, p. 52), the notion of the insider and the outsider has been a dilemma in qualitative research, especially ethnography. Thinking through this dilemma, Rhoda MacRae (2007) proposes three approaches or ways of understanding and seeing it: *outsider-in, outsider-out* and *insider-in*. For outsider-in, the researcher does not "belong to" the group she/he is studying (p. 53). The researcher starts the research as a "cultural stranger" who "learns" about the "groups' beliefs and practices through observation" and then leaves "the field to analyse the observational data" (p. 53).

Outsider-out is exemplified in the work of the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), where the researcher leaves "unexamined the impact of their social distance on the research process or its outcomes" (MacRae, 2007, p. 54). Except for Paul Willis, according to MacRae, CCCS was interested mostly in two things: (1) combining Marxist theory and external textual analysis, on the one hand, and as "outsiders" to the group and

site under study and (2) keeping their distance. So, in the outsider-out approach, researchers are "outsiders" and they keep their outsider positions.

Closer to what I am proposing in this article, MacRae's third approach is called: insider-in. Heavily influenced by feminism, MacRae explains that the insider-in approach pays particular attention to questions of status and power between the researcher and the so-called researched and recognizes the multifaceted nature of identity, context, and location. The insider-in is one whose proximity is close enough that they assume certain commonalities with the group under study. In her classic study, Oakley (1981), "a woman with children, interviewing other women with children, . . . assumed she had enough commonality to be an insider" (see MacRae, 2007, p. 54). On his part, as a Japanese-American studying Japanese, Hamabata (1991) created a research situation characterized by what MacRae (2007) calls "social proximity and familiarity" (p. 55).

For Atkinson & Hammersley (2007), Hamabata (1991), Hodkinson (2005), MacRae (2007), Roseneil (1993), and Schutz (1976), this insider-in approach, also known as "insider research," refers to the following five elements: (1) social, cultural, and linguistic proximity and famili-arity between researcher and researched, (2) for the researcher, it means fewer barriers to the research process (from research site, to participants, to data collection), (3) for the researcher, it also means fewer barriers, especially when it comes to accessibility and to getting in-depth data (crucial points for ethnography), (4) insider-researchers "participate fully and competently, . . . communicate more confidently, freely and informally without being preoccupied with the unfamiliar" (MacRae, 2007, pp. 55–56), and (5) insider-researchers are usually in tune with, especially, research participants' generalized, ideologically leaning or simply inaccurate state-ments. Reflecting on this last point, MacRae argues that, it "may be that in some cases those working from the outside-in are more likely to be misled if they do not critically reflect on the process of fieldwork, and that 'insider researchers' with their personal experience may be better placed to verify accounts and to achieve in-depth understanding" (p. 60). Put simply, although outsiders-in have the objective of learning about immigrant communities and in some cases these communities might open up to them, insiders-in take it to a deeper level of nuancing and talking about their lives and the lives around them. Therein lies the significant difference between the two communities of practice: the former learns about and has the luxury of stepping in and out of (immigrant) communities, whereas the latter is researching herself and her community, hence bringing a different kind of ethics—I–Thou Research Ethics.

But, as Hodkinson (2005) reminds us, if the insider is not vigilant, sincere, and approach-ing the position of the insider in a multidimensional and complex way, one may do more harm in perpetuating common sense, in accepting habitual modes of thinking and in not challenging the taken-for-granted. Highly cautiously, therefore, insider-researchers need to be "methodologi-cally reflexive" and strangers-in-their-own-land/within-their-own-communities. They need to be let-in, and not to assume, arrogantly, that their cultural, linguistic, and social backgrounds are an automatic guarantee to high, special, or sophisticated knowledge, on the one hand, and that they should be given full and authorized access, on the other. If one assumes thus, then one is committing violence (more than conducting research), perpetuating a unidimensional definition of identity (more than recognizing the multifaceted nature of it) and deploying exploitation and insincerity (not love, as I will discuss next). In this case, one may argue, "outsiders" might be better than "insiders." These are difficult lessons learned the hard way by Oakley and Hamabata, and it is why I am proposing to think about "love" more than "research" and "dialogue" more than "methodology."

RESEARCH AS AN ACT OF LOVE: BECOMING HUMAN IN RESEARCH

In his classic book, *Between Man and Man*, Martin Buber (2002) proposes two ideas that are central to this article: "dialogue" and "relationship." Concerning dialogue, Buber argues that there is no humanity without dialogue: I, the Self is an empty signifier without the Other or Thou. For Buber, even though dialogue can take place in silence, language and communication are central to any form of dialogue. To be able to communicate in silence is a human capacity that Buber terms "communicating intersubjectively," that is, outside language and speech act. By way of explaining, Buber offers this example: Two men sitting beside one another, the first is disposed to receive and hear whatever comes along, and the second "holds himself in reserve, withholds himself" (p. 4). Something within the rigid man cannot communicate itself—"until he releases in himself a reserve over which only he himself has power" (p. 4). In this moment, "communication streams from him" (p. 20), although in silence, and in silence it directs itself to the other man. Only in moments like these can we deploy the term "love." The communication (or is it love?) was indeed intended for the other, who receives it. In this story, the "word of dialogue has happened sacramentally" (p. 5). When it is sacramental, dialogue is holistic, it is beyond language; we can almost name it or touch it, but then it slips away. This is the space of awe, an overwhelming moment of pure feelings. This is the difficulty of talking about love, but we must.

Put otherwise, even though dialogue can exist outside the boundary of language (i.e., through feelings and in gesture and in silence), nonetheless, communication is an essential component of dialogue. As an event, dialogue is deeply embedded in time and space. In this sense, Buber argues, we need to distinguish between dialogue and monologue. If two strangers exchange glances, that reveals nothing but two people glancing at each other; there is not necessarily a dialogue. But for dialogue to take place, especially "genuine dialogue," it requires a quality of communion, a sense of time, place, and above all love. To explicate this, Buber cites the personal example of being at a conference where he engages in an emotional debate with a man who argues for the censorship of Jewish participation in a public initiative. A Jew himself, Buber engages the man through the story of Christ, using the story as an example of how Jews understand Christ in a way that is inaccessible to Christians. Despite their different perspectives, this dialogical moment ends in a kiss of brotherhood. For Buber, opinions are gone at that moment, because the factual has occurred, and in the factual, a bond of communion has occurred that is transformative. This is what Buber calls *genuine dialogue*; it happens in spite of intellectual, social, and historical differences. It is a communion and transformative act of love. It requires intellectual rigor, as it does humility.

For this article, there are four points to retain so far. First, Buber was not writing for research audiences but more for philosophers, so I have the absolutely difficult task of bringing philosophy to research discourses and the latter to the former. Second, with this bridging comes the unenviable task of talking about love. How can one talk about that which is beyond language, the slippage, the left over and the purely emotional? I will attempt to do so later. Third, for dialogue to take place sacramentally, Buber contends, it requires, on the one hand, an established human relation between researcher and so-called research participants (in the case of this special issue, immigrant communities) and, on the other, a linguistic (language and speech act) and paralinguistic code (communication in silence). Here, Buber might have been talking about insider-researcher, because when communication happens in silence, a movement has happened

from the mechanical to the genuine, from word to wordless, from language to the sacrament of love. Insider-researchers have, by and large, a deeper understanding of their community's nuanced and unspoken language, customs, and ways of being and thinking. Fourth, and finally, there is a parallel line between Buber's distinction between how Christ is approached and read by Jews and by Christians and the ethical and procedural contentions posed earlier in this article: Can outsiders do research in immigrant communities, and what are the ethical and procedural implications of/in doing so? If one is to refer back to The Stephen Tyler Affair, one may argue that it is the wrong question to ask whether outsiders *can* do research in immigrant communi-ties. "The right" question—to use the language of Socrates—is whether outsiders are mindful of their historical and subject location, especially of privilege, and the knowledge produced out of that location (see especially Oakley and Hamabata). Using Buber's vignette, one thing can be immodestly reiterated: insiders have nuanced understanding and knowledge that outsiders do not have. Nonetheless, always according to Buber's vignette, both for outsiders and insiders, research has to be an act of love; it is not a simple intellectual and academic exercise. Indeed, it is about engaging in and creating moments of *genuine dialogue*, where a kiss of comradery and brotherhood is possible and should be the ultimate aim of conducting research.

For this to happen, Buber (2002) makes a distinction among three types of dialogue (note the similarities between dialogue and research here): (1) "genuine dialogue," one "where each of the participants *really* has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and runs to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them"; (2) "technical dialogue," one "which is prompted solely by the need of objective understanding"; and (3) "monologue disguised as dialogue," one in which two or more peo-ple "meeting in space, *speak each with [her]himself* in strangely tortuous and circuitous ways and yet imagine they have escaped the torment of being thrown back on their own resources" (p. 22, emphasis added). Again, if we apply these contentions to Stephen Tyler's picture, what is revealed is this: what is setup as a dialogue is in fact a monologue, one in which one writes oneself. In the picture, the brown and black bodies are actually blocked by what appears as a towel or a handkerchief. They are—literally—lurking in the background shadow of the ethnog-rapher. The ethnographer is writing: *the center of the research here is not the brown body but the ethnographer's notes.* This is why, for Buber, we need to distinguish between dialogue and mono-logue, especially for those of us who are working and doing research not in, but *with* immigrant communities.

Not to fall into the trap of monologue disguising as dialogue, Buber (2002) makes a dis-tinction among three types of human perceptions (again, note the parallel between dialogue and research):

1. *The observer:* one who perceives another, takes notes, probes, writes up traits, and fixes the other intently in her mind as a mere set of physical features.
2. *The onlooker:* one who suspends judgment and lets herself go in an effort to perceive the other freely and undisturbed. In this sense, "All great artists have been onlookers," Buber concludes (p. 10). For both onlookers and observers, other individuals are "objects" who address them only within the utility of the research (that is, their usefulness is bound by the contribution to research data and findings). Furthermore, given this distance they create between themselves and these objects, these individuals are thus turned into "objects of study" (data) whose relation ends when the research finishes.

3. *Becoming aware:* here "a word demanding an answer has happened to me" (p. 12). Perception, Buber contends, is thus altered in a way that demands a shift in subjectivity for the individual who becomes aware. I am no longer an observer or onlooker, I am fully integrated into what I am studying. *Becoming aware* is becoming *wide-awake* (Greene, 2007) not only of my own subject location as a researcher (especially as a privileged outsider) but also of the powerful possibilities of my research findings and its social, historical, and pedagogical implications.

Put otherwise, in *becoming aware*, one is addressed, one makes oneself fully present, one opens oneself to the concrete world reality—not one's imaginary notion of it—a world "which is constantly, in every moment, reached out to me . . . . [and to comprehend this reality as] inseparable, incomparable, irreducible, now, happening once only . . . gaz[ing] upon me with a horrifying look" (Buber, 2002, p. 15). Research is no longer about collecting data, organizing notes, testing theories, but an act of love.

To become an act of love, research has to live a tension between that which is linguistically communicable and that which is purely emotional and beyond language; that is to say, between being exceptionally conscious, systematic, organized, and thoroughly ethical on the one hand and emotionally satisfying and gratifying on the other, where one is fully present and deeply connected to the history, culture, and language of the people one is researching. Here, the notion of love deserves special attention. I am deploying the term *love* throughout this paper as a complex, multilayered, multifaceted, all-encompassing category that is referring to passion as much as it is referring to caring, intimacy (that is, the sharing of deep thoughts and private feeling with an Other/Thou), compassion, mutual relation, understanding, respect, trust, fulfillment, security, Eros, self-less, consummation, and commitment. Given the academic nature of this article, a definition is required. But, I request of you, my gentle reader, to leave the concept open! Bring yourself, your reading, and your history to it. But if I am asked to define what I mean by "love," it is all of the terms above that I cited three sentences ago. They are not feathery, flimsy, and fluffy notions; and they encompass a psychoanalytic, anthropological, indigenous, and sociological approach.

To propose research as an act of love does not take away from the rigor of conducting research, as I already alluded. Indeed, the total opposite is true. To move from research to love and from methodology to dialogue, a deep, extensive, and exceptional level of knowledge of the research techniques (field notes, interviews, coding/decoding, surveys, and statistical analysis, if required, among so many others) is not only and absolutely required, but without it, one is prone to fall back into a traditional notion of research. Simply put, to practice research as an act of love, one has to be fully immersed into the traditional notion and techniques of research. To push the boundary, in other words, one has to know *what* one is pushing, *why* as well as *how* to push it. Only then, for me, can we talk about the possibility of an I–Thou Research Ethics.

HANGING OUT IN LOVE: I–THOU RESEARCH ETHICS

Two examples might illustrate what I am proposing thus far. Dwayne Donald (2010), a Canadian First Nation scholar, tells us about conducting research—"having conversations and genuine dialogue," as he put it—with the elders of the Papaschase Cree Nation in Alberta, Canada, where

he grew up and breathed the air of the place. He was seeking a deeper understanding of his own culture, language, and tradition; not simply to share it with others (First Nations and non-First Nations; as his PhD thesis research) but for his own "sanity" and for himself first. The study I am referring to here, interestingly enough, is titled, *On What Terms Can We Speak?* Without any essentialism, it is this collective insider-in "we" that makes research an act of love and turns methodology into dialogue. My second example, on the other hand, shows how the I–Thou Research Ethics is turned on its head, thus harming research participants. A friend of mine (Ms. R), an African American spoken word poet and a teacher, invited a White woman academic to attend and witness some of the workshops Ms. R was conducting in northeast New York schools. The academic ended up, on the one hand, creating rapports with the schools that Ms. R introduced her to without letting Ms. R know and, on the other, writing a book on these schools without any credit to Ms. R. As well as being unethical, this episode is one of the reasons why I am calling for I–Thou Research Ethics, but also why we need to research our own communities. Should it surprise us that fewer and fewer sites, especially schools, are giving us researchers access to conduct research (Gallagher, 2008)?

To gain their trust, we need to rethink research as an act of love and approach our research participants with I–Thou Research Ethics. This Ethics presupposes that one has to love the community *with* which one is conducting research; even more, one has to love humanity itself to study it. Only then, in Buber's language, can we talk about an I–Thou relationship, which he distinguishes from an I–It relationship. Buber argues that frequently we view both objects and people by their functions. When doctors examine us for specific illnesses, they most likely examine organisms; when scientists observe, measure, and examine the world, they learn a great deal. For Buber, all such processes are I–It relationships. In them, the world becomes disjointed and fragmented parts, a series of "things" and "objects" to be researched and, similar to a chemical lab experiment, elements to be investigated and, in some cases, manipulated.

The Stephen Tyler Affair is an unfortunate illustration of this type of relationship. Without suggesting that Tyler did not love the community where he conducted research (after all, some anthropologists went "native" to express their love), bell hooks is of the opinion that Tyler's figure and final product are both problematic and colonizing. Welcome to I–It Research Ethics! Intentions matter only in their final effect. In this Ethics, rather than truly making ourselves available to the communities we are conducting research with; rather than understanding them, sharing totally with them, really talking *with* them, we observe them or keep part of ourselves outside the moment of relationship. We presumably do this either in search for the so-called objectivity or to get them to respond to preconceived conclusions, hence, turning findings into monologue.

For Buber, there is another way of conceiving the researcher–researched relationship: I–Thou. This is a g(G)od-like relationship that is respectful of *être en soi*, the being in its own term. It finds itself mesmerized by the beauty of creation and the awesome responsibility of having to care for it and respond to it. Here, there is no research per se, there is, instead, genuine dialogue *with* Thou. Very significant to note, Thou for Buber does not refer only to God, but it refers also, and probably more importantly, to every creature, every plant, every insect, every stone, and every human that crosses its path. This I–Thou relationship paves the ground for the radical ethics I am proposing here: I–Thou Research Ethics.

In it, it is possible to place ourselves as humans and, in this case, as researchers completely into a relationship, to truly understand and "be there" with another person, without masks, pretenses, even without words. Significantly, each participant comes to such a relationship without

preconditions. The bond thus created enlarges each person, and each person responds by trying to enhance the other person. The result is true dialogue, true sharing. The categories of researcher and research participants are here reconfigured as I and Thou, wherein the latter is no longer a thing to be researched with regard to which conclusions and theories are to be tested, but a being whose very existence is baffling and any research should therefore aim at expressing the power that binds us as researchers with it.

In the I–Thou Research Ethics, moreover, the researcher is also a research participant, she/he is an integral part of the research and the questions posed. Dwayne Donald (2010) shows us how this might look in his dialogue with the elders in the Cree Nation of Alberta. He is not an observer or onlooker because, in Buber's (2002) terms, both "are similarly oriented, in that they have a position, namely, the very desire to perceive the man who is living before [their] eyes (p. 11). Because of this desire, Buber would have contended, observers and onlookers may very well end up writing their perceptions (read what they think) of "the man who is living before [their] eyes." With them, the possibility is always present that their perception of the being does not necessarily mean a faithful translation of reality. In the I–Thou Research Ethics, on the other hand, the so-called researcher is aware—*wide-awake*—not only of the power bestowed on him/her by virtue of his/her subjectivity (falling under the privileged category of researcher or Whiteness) or professional location (being a university professor), but also of the limits of knowing. The term research is thus substituted by dialogue and as Buber (2002) put it, the "limits of the possibility of dialogue are the limits of awareness" (p. 12).

Fully conscious of his/her power and subject position, with humility, the researcher enters this dialogue with an incredible sense of responsibility. The aim of this dialogue (otherwise called research) is to create a genuine dialogue—not a technical dialogue or even a monologue in which one sees one's self and hears one's own voice. In genuine dialogue, beings are experienced and discovered in their own terms; they speak and reveal themselves to us in ways that have never been spoken or revealed because nothing can be repeated twice. Notions of research reproducibility and generalization are therefore put into serious questioning. As significant, Buber (2002) explains, "it is no experience that can be remembered independently of the situation, it remains the address of that moment and cannot be isolated, it remains the question of a questioner and will have its answer" (p. 14). In other words, nothing can be interpreted, translated, or explained outside the context of its happening or those who are making sense of it.

There is no contradiction, here, between the Buberian notion of dialogue and my contention that nothing can be interpreted outside its context. For Buber, there is no universal dialogue. Dialogue can happen only in context and with Thou. The challenge for the I–Thou Research Ethics, therefore, is that I–Thou is not a constant or even static relationship. As humans (and for this study, as researchers) we go back and forth between I–Thou and I–It. Ironically, Buber explains, any attempt to achieve an I–Thou moment will fail because the process of trying to create an I–Thou relationship objectifies it and thus makes it I–It. So, as researchers, the most we could do to achieve genuine dialogue is simply to *be available* to the possibility of an I–Thou moment. Given its ephemeral nature, however, an I–Thou moment is beyond language; as already explained, it is a moment of being. To reach it, one has to be absolutely and fully conscious of one's role as researcher; so much so that one finds oneself in a radical space of genuine dialogue. Being a continental African myself, and working primarily with continental African communities in North America, elsewhere (Ibrahim, 2010a), I called this *hanging out methodology*. Framing my study squarely within an I–Thou Research Ethics, I spent more than

two years dialoguing (i.e., researching) *with* a group of African youth who find themselves in a high school in a metropolitan city in southwestern Ontario, Canada. Because of my involvement in the weekly and, for a long time, daily school activities—eventually becoming their academic advisor, Big Brother, and basketball team coach—my status as a researcher had different names. Inside and outside school, I was called by my first name, I was invited to attend their classes, I was invited to their houses, I was invited to picnics, and I came to know their families. Immodestly, and maybe arrogantly, on one occasion (Ibrahim, 2006b), I argued that my position as a researcher "was forgotten." My intent there was neither to erase the students' side and how they saw me as a university professor and researcher, nor to unproblematically obscure my power, subject position, or privilege. I was too conscious of that power and location. Instead, my argument was that we were engaged in creating a complex space of research, power, and dialogue. If one is ever allowed a position of judgment, I would say there was a genuine dialogue, a conversation that did not merely involve speaking at one, but that existed in silence. It happened when we became unreserved, a total being in time and space. Similar to Donald (2010), research was thus turned into dialogue and heretofore an act of love. As one student put it after dinner in the student's house: "that was a great conversation" (for detailed description of my research, see Ibrahim, 2006a, 2006b, 2008a, 2008b, in press).

THIS IS NOT A CONCLUSION: TOWARD A STRONG POETRY

Dialogue—if I may so term research—is unapologetically subjective when it comes to I–Thou Research Ethics. It requires human relationships that are beyond the confines of imposed categories of researcher and research subjects. Furthermore, one has to take his/her ethical responsibility very seriously because, when it comes to immigrant communities, one is called on to be a witness, and with witnessing comes the ethical responsibility of telling. Very significantly, this telling may involve the telling/writing of stories that the community might not want to hear (Ibrahim, 2010b). This is the *ethics of the appointment*, which is an integral part of the I–Thou Research Ethics, wherein one is called on—*appointed* to tell others either what they do not know or know but do not have the language to articulate.

For dialogue (i.e., research) to be transformative, especially when immigrant communities are involved, the researcher has to become a *strong poet*. Strong poets, Richard Rorty (1989) explains, do not simply write verses or tell us what we already know. Strong poets are so eloquent in their language, so visionary in their conviction, that the familiar, the immediate, and the known become unfamiliar and unknown. The strong poets, Rorty adds, are horrified of simply being "a copy or a replica"; they have the courage and audacity to engage, look for, and think through the "blind impresses," the gaps, and the blind spots of thoughts, ideas, and practices. The blind impresses are the difficult knowledges—problems, if you like—that society prefers not to face, be it aggression, war, xenophobia, ethnosupremacy, racism, sexism, or homophobia. In the face of formidable pressure, the strong poets will choose to walk through these "problems," so to speak, and deal with them at the individual, national, and global level. When it comes to I–Thou Research Ethics, this requires not only humility but wide-awakeness to what is here and now and what is there and possible. It requires a vigilant and keen observer who is mindful of the limits of love, that it should not blind us, and not to reinscribe the Tyler handkerchief. It requires a new language, a radical I–Thou Research Ethics in which research does not become another

tool of/for colonization. Above all, it requires a new politics, conceptualization, and relationship between the so-called researcher and his/her research participants. Here, if one is left to imagine, Buber would have told Stephen Tyler to move away his handkerchief, turn his face toward his host, and humbly have a genuine I–Thou dialogue (for similar arguments based on "relational-cultural theory," see Walker & Rosen, 2004). So, one might ask in conclusion, the people we are dialoguing with (i.e., researching) offer us their lives, especially immigrant communities; what are we researchers bringing to the table? I certainly hope our contribution will be a new verse, a symphonic poem, or a sonata that we have not heard before. Dare we become strong poets who are wide-awake of the possibility and responsibility of the I–Thou Research Ethics?

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