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Autobiography, Autoethnography, and Intersubjectivity

Analyzing Communication in Northern Pakistan

David Butz

Don't write this down; remember it in your head.
Don't take a picture; remember this in your heart.
Don't leave a message; things come apart.
Talk to me face to face.
—Indigo Girls, "Dead Man's Hill," 1994

My purpose in this chapter is to explore how my interpretations of communicative processes in a small mountain community in Pakistan have been constituted through, and constitutive of, important facets of my recent autobiography as they relate to my interactions with the community. Specifically, I show how the efforts of some Shimshali villagers to colonize my subject position by communicating with me in certain ways—by imbricating me in certain regimes of intersubjectivity—informs an analysis of communication in their community.[1] Indeed, my own communicative experiences in

Many thanks to Kathryn Besio, Nancy Cook, and Pamela Moss for their helpful comments on an earlier draft, and to the people of Shimshal for engaging me in the terrifying and deeply gratifying process of lifeworld reconstitution.

1. During my fourteen months in Shimshal over the past decade I have had face-to-face interactions with most of the men in the community, and with perhaps a third of Shimshali women. I must stress, however, that my most intense, sustained, and complex interactions have been with two dozen or so Shimshali men, most of them leading community and lineage elders and their closest relatives (including

Shimshal keep returning me to Habermasian themes of communicative action and intersubjectivity, despite my general theoretical sympathy with alternative poststructural readings of the power-embeddedness of all communication. As a result, one of my theoretical challenges has been to conceptualize how communities like Shimshal may nurture a strong commitment to the ideal of intersubjectivity and communicative action, while retaining a clear sense of the asymmetries of power that contextualize their interactions within and outside the community. This effort reflects a recognition that my autobiography can be treated neither as a sole, trustworthy analytical tool (to the exclusion of larger theoretical issues) nor merely as an obstacle to be circumvented.

I begin with a brief overview of my research involvement in Shimshal, emphasizing my use of Habermas's concepts of communicative action and intersubjectivity to interpret recent changes to Shimshali social organization. I then describe villagers' attempts to incorporate me into a process of communicative action—in effect, to insert themselves into my autobiography—by nurturing contingencies that encourage me to (a) create a place for the community in the way I understand myself; (b) create a place for myself in the way I understand the community; and (c) involve myself in the way social and political relations unfold there. Next, I explore villagers' insistence that I endeavor to understand the community intersubjectively, and that in so doing I participate in Shimshal's political struggles with the outside world in ways that influence my own politics, career, and worldview. In particular, I examine Shimshalis' efforts—at least partially successful—to involve me directly in their

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several women). Discussion in this chapter refers mainly to these interactions. I cannot say with confidence that other Shimshalis, were they to interact more closely with me, would deal with me in the way I describe here. I can say, however, that few of the many interactions I have had with other community members contradicted the stance and strategy described here. It is worth noting that my closest acquaintances in Shimshal are precisely those individuals who have been identified by other villagers as having the formal responsibility of dealing with foreigners like me. Thus, although the Shimshali stance described here is not representative of the community in a "sampling" sense, it is the predominant stance of those authorized to represent the community. Of course, the context within which specific individuals are authorized to deal with foreigners is not domination-free.

autoethnographic representations of the community to the outside world, and the implications of those efforts for the relationship between my autobiography and their ethnography. I conclude with a discussion of the analytical implications of my relationship with Shimshalis, emphasizing the disquieting effects such a relationship has had for my theorization of communication (see Butz 1995; Butz and Eyles 1997), and more recently resistance (see Butz 1997), in the community of Shimshal.

Communication and Social Organization in Shimshal

Shimshal is a farming and herding village of some 110 households, located in the Central Karakoram mountains in Pakistan's Northern Areas. Villagers cultivate about 150 hectares of terraced and irrigated land between 3000 and 3300 meters above sea level, almost exclusively for subsistence, and graze livestock on 2700 km^2 of territory surrounding their village. Efforts to market produce outside the community are hampered by the village's distance of two days' walk from motorized transport. Thus, the community's growing monetary economy depends mainly on nonagricultural activities. Chief among these is portering—transporting tourists' baggage for pay (see Butz 1995; MacDonald and Butz 1998). Since 1985, all Shimshali households have belonged to one of three Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) Village Organizations (VOs) that have formed in the community. The AKRSP's main objective has been to incorporate villages like Shimshal into a regional agricultural economy by funding infrastructural projects (in Shimshal, the construction of a link road) and by providing low-interest credit and agricultural training to communities that form a village organization that meets regularly and that satisfies a variety of other organizational conditions (e.g., paying weekly dues, attending regular meetings, consensually appointing village-level administrators, opening a village organization savings account, and collectively laboring on infrastructural projects).

My purpose, when I first went to Shimshal in 1988 and 1989, was to evaluate the implications of this new organizational structure, the AKRSP VOs, for the community's ability to sustain itself socially, politically, economically, and ecologically (see Butz 1993). In my ef-

forts to understand indigenous community sustainability in processual terms, I focused on indigenous modes of communication, and especially communication geared to village-level decision making. After several months of ethnographic research in Shimshal I began to develop an understanding of these processes and their relation to community sustainability in terms of Habermas's theory of discursive legitimacy.[2]

Although my intention here is not to rehearse the complexities of Habermas's social theory (for this, see Butz 1993, 1995), a brief overview of parts of his theory of communicative action provides necessary context for understanding the relevance of autobiography to my continuing analysis of communication in Shimshal. Stated simply, *discursive legitimacy* arises when participants in conversation achieve intersubjective understanding through communicative action. Included as *communicative action* are all activities geared toward reaching understanding with other actors through a cooperative process of discussion (Thompson 1983). Thus, according to Habermas, communicative action offers participants the potential to overcome their specific subjective views, to assess themselves intersubjectively. Such an intersubjective assessment can be based on any of three irreducible *validity claims:* a statement is rational if it is accepted as true in the objective sense, if it is accepted as socially correct, or if it is accepted as a sincere expression of the speaker's subjective world (Habermas 1981, 302–9). Each validity claim relates to utterances emanating from a particular realm of experience. Thus, we conceive of actors striving to understand some practical situation with which they are confronted, so that they can coordinate their actions consensually (White 1988, 39). They reach this understanding by relating to objective, social, and subjective realms of experience, through the corresponding validity claims (White 1988, 39–44). Habermas argues that this process of achieving inter-

2. In this section I am applying Habermas's very narrow definition to the terms "discourse" and "discursive": that is, rationally motivated argumentation within a context of free speech devoid of variations of power and linguistic competence among participants (see Habermas 1981, 42). Strictly speaking, I am being redundant in my use of the term "communicative discourse" because Habermas's definition of "discourse" presupposes communicative action.

subjective understanding through communicative discourse is just only if it occurs within an *ideal speech situation;* that is, one without variations in power or linguistic competence among participants (Habermas 1981, 273–331). He concedes that an ideal speech situation never occurs but remains a sought-after ideal, just as oppression and domination always exist in all social relationships.

Habermas's model is especially relevant for my interest in the communication processes by which indigenous communities sustain themselves because of his assertion that justice and rationality in decision-making rest on the procedures through which decisions are made (Habermas 1981, 1987); the justice of roles and outcomes is contingent upon the rationality of a decision-making process. For Habermas, the process of communicative action—intersubjective validation of one another's experiences—enables the rationalized reproduction of a matrix of background convictions, described as a shared lifeworld, and manifest more concretely as generalizable interests: things that participants in discourse agree are desirable. These interests, intersubjectively shared by participants in communicative discourse, become the primary underlying influences on specific decisions. But, generalizable interests, and the lifeworld they represent, are not static. They are revised and reproduced each time participants attempt to use them as bases for validating utterances. An important implication is that as we cannot expect different speech communities (or the same ones, at different times) to share identical generalizable interests, neither can we expect what they call just or rational decisions to be identical.

I have always been uncomfortable with applying as modernist and Eurocentric a metatheory as Habermas's to an analysis of social organization in a small village in northern Pakistan. Had I felt competent to base my analysis solely on "distanced" observations of how Shimshalis communicate with one any other, I think I would have abandoned a Habermasian interpretation long ago, despite the community's obvious commitment to village-level consensual decision making. What prevents me from doing so is my own experience of Shimshalis' sustained communicative efforts, over a period of a decade, to reconstitute my lifeworld—my autobiography—and theirs, so that something approaching intersubjective communication is possible between us. As my research interests in Shimshal have

shifted from a general focus on community sustainability to a more specific concentration on Shimshali resistance to domination within the adventure tourism industry this experience has intensified, and I recognize that my experience of Shimshalis' attempts to create conditions conducive to communicative action with outsiders is not unique (see Butz 1997). It is a tactic common to villagers' interactions with Western tourists, which confirms my sense of Shimshalis' general commitment to an ideal of intersubjective communication in their relations with other Shimshalis and with outsiders. In the following section, I enumerate some of the ways that Shimshalis have inserted themselves, their community and their lifeworld into my autobiography.

The Colonization of My Autobiography

Shortly after I began research in Shimshal—at around the time several leading community members decided I was unlikely to be a danger, and could become a resource—the villagers I had closest contact with began a process of taking over my research project.[3]

3. My use of the term "colonization" to describe the ways that Shimshalis' discourses have infiltrated my subject position requires some explanation, especially as I enjoy obviously greater access than do Shimshalis to the material and discursive resources of power in a global field of domination. I think it is appropriate—rather than offensive—to speak of the "colonization of my autobiography" for several reasons.

First, I am attempting a fairly straightforward play on Habermas's notion of the "inner colonization of the lifeworld." Habermas uses the concept to describe how the process of lifeworld disenchantment necessary for the nurturance of communicative action is, in a capitalist world system, undermined as "the media of money and power increasingly infiltrate spheres of social life in which traditions and knowledge are transferred, in which normative bonds are intersubjectively established, and in which responsible persons are formed" (White 1988, 112). As such, the inner colonization of the lifeworld is characterized as a unilateral process—in global social and spatial terms, from the "West" to the "East"—akin to colonialism in general. Thus, both the potential for communicative action and its most powerful frustration are conceptualized as originating in the modernized "West." My use of colonization acknowledges the transcultural nature of lifeworld colonization; that conditions sometimes emerge for subaltern populations to use their own form

This occurred initially through the straightforward procedure of regulating my access to information and experiences, but gradually developed into a more subtle tactic of encouraging—even requiring—me to situate myself within a specific set of discursive relationships with the community.[4] With the passage of time the latter tactic

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of inner colonization to resist the lifeworld-colonizing influence of the systemic media of money and bureaucratic power, in this case (although not necessarily) to increase the potential for intersubjective understanding.

Second, the implications of this play on inner colonization are commensurate with Bhabha's assertion that colonial power is never possessed entirely by the colonizer because of an ambivalence that lies at the root of the West's approach to subaltern Otherness, which is characterized by a will to produce "the colonized as a fixed reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible" (Bhabha 1983, 199). Bhabha suggests that colonial power produces hybridized subjectivities, through which "other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority" (Bhabha 1985, 156). Hybridity can thus be used by the colonized to become a "strategic reversal of the process of domination" (Bhabha 1985,154); it transforms colonial discourse into something that disrupts what colonizers intended, by tactically inserting repressed knowledges into colonial discourses. What I am describing as the colonization of my autobiography is just such a tactical insertion, and I experience it that way.

Third, and stemming from the previous two points, is the necessity to recognize colonization as a process that colonizes members of both the "colonized" and the "colonizing" societies. The latter is aided by the tactical maneuvers of the colonized, which are denied by too unilateral an understanding of colonization. And it is important to assert that this bilateral process occurs locally despite radical global asymmetries in access to material and discursive resources, and without denying the massive implications of these asymmetries, both locally and globally. In sum, western researchers working in situations similar to that described in this chapter need to recognize (and embrace) their own vulnerability to colonization by their "subjects" as a first step in efforts to develop non-Othering interpretations.

4. Here, and for the remainder of the chapter, I am following Gregory's description of discourse as "all the ways in which we communicate with one another, to that vast network of signs, symbols and practices through which we make our world(s) meaningful to ourselves and to others" (Gregory 1994, 11). According to Foucault (1972, 46; emphasis in original) "whenever between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity . . . we are dealing with a *discursive formation*." Discourses and discursive formations are constitutive of the conduct of day-to-day life (Barnes and Duncan 1992, 8), central to the naturalization of particular worldviews (Foucault 1967), and situated in specific fields of power and knowledge that may be contested and negotiated. They are also shifting, contingent, and partial. What Habermas calls discourse—argumentation

has intensified to the extent that I find myself an active participant in this incorporation, while the former tactic of regulating access to instrumental information has diminished significantly. My relationship with the community's fledgling environmental education program exemplifies this gradual shift. I spent a disproportionate amount of my first seasons in Shimshal attempting to acquire background statistical information on population, household composition, agricultural productivity, and so forth. My efforts were obstructed at every turn, sometimes without explanation, and sometimes with the justification that I could not be trusted with such information. More often Shimshalis argued that the information I sought was simply not relevant for understanding the most important things about Shimshal; a point I thought was well taken. Meanwhile, in a different part of the village, school children were busy collecting—under the auspices of the "Shimshal Environmental Education Program"—exactly the type of information I thought I needed. For a long time I remained unaware of these data-gathering activities. Later, I was told of students' activities but denied access to their results. Two summers ago I was finally given full access to all data they had collected. During my most recent visit to Shimshal I found myself in the unexpected and conflictual position of revising my research interests—at the request of community elders—for the sole purpose of providing students with a reason to expand their data-gathering efforts, *and* encouraging teachers to reconsider this recent emphasis on teaching students to understand their home in statistical terms. In this instance, as in others, persuasion/incorporation have largely replaced coercion/violence as mechanisms for contextualizing my activities in Shimshal; a shift that indicates Shimshalis' and my mutual efforts to establish some shared generalizable interests, some potential bonds of intersubjectivity.

The process through which villagers have strategically situated

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within an ideal speech situation —is a very specific discursive practice, and one way that discourses (in the Foucauldian sense) are constructed and manipulated. Part of my argument is that Shimshalis' attempts to engage me in communicative discourse have both inserted my autobiography into local discursive formations, and aided in what I am describing as the colonization of my autobiography by these same discursive configurations.

me in a common discourse (narrative, ethnography, autobiography) with the community of Shimshal has had three main elements. First, they have insisted that I create a space for the community in the way I understand myself. This has meant incorporating me, and recently my family, into the household and lineage activities, concerns, and obligations of the people I am closest to while I am in the community. By investing me with household-based obligations in the community's public sphere (such as participating in and contributing to agricultural festivals), and by involving me in discussions about the future of junior members of "my" household, my research participants enlarged the scope of my lifeworld to include their household-level and community-level generalizable interests, and created an opportunity—some common ground—to engage me in communicative action. This can be explained, in part, in terms of a local ethic of hospitality to outsiders. But, the shared experience of giving/receiving hospitality is also a basis for intersubjectivity, a basis for establishing communicative connections. And discourses of hospitality are closely related to discourses of obligation. For example, at a certain point it became clear that part of the reciprocal relationship of hospitality I enjoyed with the household in which I lived was an obligation to participate in "finishing" the household's eldest son: to help him prepare to assume his father's position as an influential (and highly educated) lineage elder. Because the household's position in the village was prominent, this obligation was also expressed—and experienced—at the scales of lineage and community. We decided that the young man would serve as my (well-paid) research assistant; a decision that had everything to do with his education and anticipated social position, and little to do with my research requirements (which would have benefited from a more scholarly assistant). Our research association did help "finish" the young man, as well as provide the context for us to become friends, as his parents anticipated. It also effectively created a space for Shimshal in the way I understand myself: my research interests and a household's aspirations have become closely entwined; the web of responsibilities in which my identity is enmeshed has grown; and I now understand one of my power-effects to be the way my patronage of this young man has influenced power relations in the village of Shimshal.

Shimshalis' efforts to insert the life of their community into my

own lifeworld extend beyond the spatial borders of Shimshal. Villagers also make a point of comprising part of my everyday life when I am elsewhere in Pakistan, by visiting me, by seeking my assistance in their down-country activities, and by occasionally using my town home as the hub of their own lives outside the village. Although I have not yet entertained Shimshali visitors in Canada, I do receive frequent news from Shimshal, and offers and expectations of advice and assistance by mail. As I write this from my office in southern Ontario, I am in the midst of trying to negotiate a way for one of Shimshal's most educated young men to study "enterprise development" at a Canadian university. In this way, and others, my lifeworld, my life here in Canada, and Shimshalis' dreams, plans, and social strategies are mutually imbricated, in a manner that is highly time/space distanciated. Again, the experience of offering/expecting hospitality is a source for the development of further intersubjectivity.

These concrete, and unrelenting, activities have the effect of reconstituting my sense of self to incorporate my relations with the community. Shimshalis have also taken pains to connect my life and theirs at a more structural and historical level, by insisting that I recognize the relationship between my position within a history of colonizing and theirs within a history of colonization. My experience with this effort to situate historically their circumstances within my life is shared by the many trekkers to Shimshal who are reminded of the colonial lineage of contemporary portering labor relations, and who are sometimes asked quite explicitly to choose among identifying with archetypal colonial era explorers, down-country tour organizers, or the Shimshalis who are carrying their loads and offering them hospitality (see Butz 1997). For example, porters who speak some English often pass time on the trail by telling trekkers—and other travelers, like me, who walk along the trails to Shimshal—stories of Shimshal's history; stories that hint at an "authenticity" that is contrasted to the hybridized present;[5] stories that introduce us to knowledge whose origins predate the field of colonial domination.

5. "Authenticity" is placed in quotation marks to indicate that although travelers frequently search for an "authentic" experience, the concept of "native authenticity" is itself problematic.

We are thus initiated into a vision of potential authenticity, forcibly denied by outsiders like ourselves. We are also told in some detail of the ways threats to this authenticity have been resisted, and of the precedents for everyday resistance in indigenous history. The candor with which porters reveal this gives us (trekkers and researchers alike) a taste of the "authenticity" we may desire. Later, when we are victimized by the same forms of everyday resistance, we may be thrilled—or ashamed—to recognize and experience subaltern "authenticity" more fully. I understand this as an attempt to exert some control over the discursive representation of everyday practices of resistance, to clearly identify these practices as resistance and not oriental dissolution, and to provide trekkers and other visitors with a sense of our own complicity in the reproduction of a set of oppressive labor relations. Of course, all these activities can be read as strategic efforts to gain some instrumental resources from the most proximate representative of domination. An important part of my argument is that Shimshalis' hopes of achieving any of these instrumental gains relies on a commensurate hope of establishing, despite great differences in subject positioning, some common understandings of certain aspects of the world sufficient to form the basis of consensual decision making.

A second, and only heuristically separable, way that Shimshalis have situated me in a common discourse with their community is by encouraging me to create a space for myself in the way I understand Shimshal. In the same way Shimshalis remind me that their history of subordination is connected to my history of domination, they also remind me that my program of research influences their processes of communication, and more recently, their efforts to resist domination. Moreover, community members have quite deliberately involved me in ways that will ensure that my presence in the village reconstitutes dominant community-level discourses, by inviting me to argue in the public sphere in Shimshal, and to represent Shimshal in certain venues outside the community. In a related move, villagers have not hesitated to variously credit me with, and blame me for, discursive shifts in Shimshal and with the outside world. I experience this as exposure to continual and explicit evaluation; a sort of "let's talk about how you're doing, and what you need to work on" that enumerates the trajectory of my status in various

spheres of public opinion in Shimshal. My examiners' emphasis throughout has been on the assertion, sometimes the accusation, that Shimshal is our common project, mine as well as theirs. This deliberately crafted commonality of purpose is another element that unites my lifeworld with Shimshalis' and prepares the way for potential communicative action.

Third, these mainly dialogic efforts to spin threads of mutual obligation and subject/community constitution between Shimshal and me have their concrete manifestations materially and institutionally. The fact that I have accepted certain material obligations to the households I have lived with to their material benefit, attempted to sway public discussions in Shimshal sometimes as a spokesperson for particular factions within the community, and acted to represent my interpretations of Shimshali interests to various agencies outside of the community, all help to establish the basis for asserting that Shimshal is indeed our common project, and an integral part of my autobiography.[6]

After a decade of exposing myself to these processes of incorporation, I recognize that my autobiography has become a jointly produced, shared resource in our struggle for intersubjective understanding, as well as an important—if somewhat ephemeral—analytical tool. My autobiography bleeds into their autoethnography.

Autobiography Bleeding into Autoethnography

Shimshalis' attempts to incorporate my autobiography into their project is an intense example of a more general autoethnographic

6. It is worth noting that each of the three ways Shimshalis have strategically situated me in a common discourse with the community is strengthened and complicated by community members' separate—but not independent—relationships with my partner (who has spent five months in Shimshal) and our daughter (who visited Shimshal briefly when she was three, and again for several months when she was five). The web of associations, obligations, and opportunities for communication that connect my lifeworld with Shimshalis' is intensified by the fact that I share Nancy and Nina with them, they share Nancy and me with Nina, Nancy shares me and them with Nina, and so forth; and this is multiplied by our associations with a range of diverse Shimshali "thems." To varying degrees we have all become one anothers' projects.

agenda to establish a strategic intersubjectivity with certain categories of outsiders. Mary Louise Pratt (1992, 7; emphasis in original) uses the term *"autoethnography"* to "refer to instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that *engage with* the colonizer's own terms." She goes on to explain that "if ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations" (Pratt 1992, 7). Pratt employs autoethnography quite specifically, to describe the translation of indigenous cultural texts into the language and idiom of metropolitan literate culture. I think the concept has greater heuristic utility if it is expanded to include any attempts by subordinate groups to establish a communicative basis for explaining themselves to—and to establish a common understanding of their group circumstances with—those dominant outsiders who have conventionally assumed the prerogative to represent and explain the subordinate group in their stead. The latter definition retains the situatedness of autoethnographic representations within a field of asymmetrical power relations but foregrounds subordinate groups' occasional reliance on the ideal of intersubjectivity as a tactic for resisting subordination. Autoethnographic expressions are likely to be aimed at quite specific audiences; those from which subordinate groups have some reason to expect a sincere effort at communication. To the extent that subordinate groups realize such audiences are rare, autoethnographic expression—and the search for intersubjective understanding more generally—is likely to be only a small part of a larger repertoire of everyday resistance to domination (Scott 1990).

The community of Shimshal has involved me in their autoethnographic project in two ways. First, their efforts to establish a basis for intersubjective understanding through the three processes described in the previous section are themselves autoethnographic endeavors. I have become an object (subject) of their autoethnographic expressions. The insistence of many Shimshalis that it is possible for us to engage in communicative action, despite my frequently expressed doubts, and their continual labor to engage and incorporate me into a set of Shimshali generalizable interests, are both indicative that I

have been identified as an audience from whom Shimshalis can expect a relatively sincere effort at communication.

Second, Shimshalis have enlisted me as an ingredient and agent of their autoethnography. I am presently part of the story Shimshalis tell of themselves to the outside world. I am presented as an artifact—a living proof—of the community's claims to hospitality, modernity, openness to scientific research, and potential for productive and nonexploitative relations with the outside world. My story has become part of their autoethnography; part of their attempts to establish a basis for meaningful communication with others.

I have also become an agent for the refinement and circulation of their autoethnography. Shimshalis have sought my assistance in helping them craft their autoethnography into a language and idiom that might allow them to communicate with those that dominate them. In some cases this has been the language of political entitlement; in others, the language of cultural and ecological sustainability. They have also enlisted me to speak their autoethnography in places Shimshalis cannot reach, through scholarly publications and conference presentations, and also more informally in conversation with whomever I think constitutes a relevant audience. I find myself in an awkward position as coauthor of some of Shimshal's autoethnographic expressions; an indication both of the extent to which Shimshalis trust (are forced to rely on) whatever level of intersubjective understanding we have achieved, and of the vulnerability of autoethnographic expression to appropriation by members of dominant groups. The most significant example of my coauthorship in Shimshal's autoethnographies has been my involvement in the Shimshal Nature Trust. In the early summer of 1997 I returned to the village after an absence of two years. I was met by a delegation who immediately asked me to help them frame a set of formal guidelines for the internal and autonomous stewardship of their territory (in opposition to a government/NGO initiative to incorporate most of Shimshal territory into a limited-use national park). Over the course of the summer these guidelines expanded into the Shimshal Nature Trust (SAT). I was assigned the limited task of collating community members' various ambitions for the trust into a draft document, in English, that would describe and justify the trust to non-Shimshalis, as well as define a set of operating

principles and procedures for villagers (I was also asked to put the document on the World Wide Web, and distribute hard copies at my discretion).[7] This was not an unproblematic act of translation, nor did the Shimshalis who solicited my input imagine it to be. We all realized—with trepidation all around—that opportunities for misrepresentation abounded. My involvement in the trust—an important autoethnographic expression—was a leap of faith: Shimshalis' desperate faith in my trustworthiness; my own uncertain faith in my fidelity to the community's (by no means unified) sense of itself; and, especially, a mutual faith in those fragments of intersubjectivity linking my autobiography to their autoethnography.

Three points emerge from this discussion of my incorporation into Shimshal's autoethnography. First, I do not think the process by which I have slipped from being a privileged audience of Shimshal's autoethnography to being a coauthor is unique to my experience. It is fairly typical of the autoethnographic expressions of subordinate groups that they are not just attempts at autorepresentation, but also aim to incorporate the intended audience into the autoethnographic project. In these cases subordinate groups' relative lack of power—the absence of an ideal speech situation—may actually force them to rely on the ideal of communicative action in order to give voice to their autoethnographic expressions, with the attendant risk (almost inevitability) that a cynical audience will appropriate and recirculate a distorted version to serve their own purposes of domination.

Second, to the extent that autoethnography is, by definition, a political strategy, my incorporation into Shimshalis' autoethnographic project inserts me into Shimshal's political struggles in ways that influence my own program of research, career, and politics more generally. Given the circumstances described throughout this chapter, I have found it impossible (and undesirable) to avoid identifying myself publicly with Shimshal's struggles, and to some extent against the development agencies, international ecological organizations, tour operators, and Pakistani administrative units with which Shimshal is struggling. This identification has influenced the

7. The Shimshal Nature Trust can be located at http://www.BrockU.CA/geography/people/dbutz/shimshal.html.

tone and content of my scholarly publications, the details of my vitae, the objectives of my research applications, the content of my teaching; in short, all public and professional expressions of my recent autobiography. This has implications, no doubt, for the long-term development of my career.

Third, and most relevant to my main argument, my various points of insertion into Shimshalis' autoethnography have shaped my own autobiography and given me an opportunity to use that autobiography in ways that profoundly influence my analysis of communication in Shimshal. In the chapter's final section, I focus on the interpretive implications of using this discursive relationship with Shimshalis as an important source of data for understanding processes of communication in the village.

Autobiography, Autoanalysis, and the Politics of Hope

I have argued throughout this chapter that many of the Shimshalis I am closest to have engaged in a lengthy and subtle, but quite overt, endeavor to colonize my autobiography by tinkering with my lifeworld. Their stated objective has been to create a set of shared circumstances that allow us to understand one another better; what Habermas would describe as establishing the lifeworld basis for communicative action. This is obviously a strategic political undertaking. Shimshalis are not expending this level of effort on me simply for the pleasure of communication, although in a cultural setting as conversationally oriented as Shimshal it would be unwise to underestimate the joy of aesthetically satisfying verbal communication. Rather, they *hope* that by crafting the basis for intersubjective understanding they will create in me a trustworthy and reliable ally in their autoethnographic, and other political, struggles. I doubt that a "distanced" examination of communication in Shimshal, were such a thing possible, would have revealed that Shimshalis' commitment to the ideal of intersubjectivity is a *politics of hope* fueled by the desperation of the powerless.

An autobiographically driven sense of this politics of hope allows me to reevaluate the potential and limitations of Habermas's theory

of communicative action in situations such as these. Habermas imagines legitimate communicative action as emerging only in situations where all participants share similar characteristics of communicative competence and power. As a result, his theory of communicative action is poorly equipped to deal effectively with a poststructural conceptualization of the power-embeddedness of discourse (Poster 1989). What my experience of Shimshalis' efforts to colonize my autobiography suggests, is that it may be productive to imagine communicative action less as the unattainable outcome of an unattainable ideal speech situation, and more as a principle, and mechanism, for selectively and strategically reducing power asymmetries. For Shimshalis, commitment to the ideal of communicative action does not betray a naïveté toward their relative lack of *power* vis-à-vis the outsiders they encounter, including me. Rather, this commitment is a strategy, selectively deployed, both to neutralize somewhat the power of the outsider, and to incorporate aspects of that power into their own autoethnographic endeavors. In other words, Shimshalis engage in communicative endeavors with outsiders, not because they fail to recognize their relative lack of discursive power, but precisely because their strong sense of powerlessness in the instrumental realm causes them to recognize that their only hope of neutralizing the power of the Other is to incorporate selective Others into an intersubjective recognition of, and commitment to, Shimshalis' validity claims. Moreover, to the extent that residents of communities like Shimshal recognize that this is a faint hope indeed, they will also engage in other, less intersubjectively oriented strategies to practice some power over powerful outsiders. Contrary to what Habermas's conceptualization might suggest, Shimshalis are playing several games at once, only one of them communicative. This helps to account for my frequent sense of betrayal by Shimshalis; even as they are engaged in sincere, if strategic, efforts at communicative action with me, they are also keeping other paths open. I am too valuable as an immediate instrumental resource to be approached only from a longer-term communicative position. Occasional betrayal of the latter in the interests of the former is a strategy, the risks of which are calculated according to Shimshalis' hopes that I share their understanding of the need to play several games at

once. The politics of hope implicit in the search for intersubjectivity is merely one in a variable set of practices of everyday resistance (Scott 1990). For the powerless, hope is itself a practice of resistance.

The risks implicit in playing this game of intersubjectivity with the more powerful also help us to understand the much advertised ambivalence of subaltern discourse (Bhabha 1984, 1985). In the attempt to create some basis for intersubjectivity with me Shimshalis are engaged in what is well described as a limited and strategic mimicry of my discourse in an attempt to incorporate me into theirs. Autoethnography is characteristically such a form of mimicry which hopes to reach out to an intersubjective engagement with the Other.

It is worth noting that these autobiographical reflections on the characteristics of my interactions with Shimshalis have sensitized me to similar characteristics of communication and resistance *within* the community. Specifically, I have become more aware of both the importance of the ideal of communicative action to community-level discourses, and the stark—if somewhat veiled—internal asymmetries of power that contextualize the deployment of this ideal.

I am led to conclude that my experience in Shimshal demonstrates a more general situation in which the interpretation of field research and the process of reflecting on autobiography cannot be, nor should be, separated, methodologically or epistemologically. Moreover, the theories we develop to explain our research findings are necessarily autoethnographic: attempts to reach out to incorporate others into our autobiographies, based on a politics of (faint) hope that intersubjectivity is possible despite radical power asymmetries within the academy and without.