ARTICLES

The Value of Autoethnography for Field Research in Transcultural Settings*

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Mary Louise Pratt uses the term *autoethnography* to refer to those instances in which members of colonized groups strive to represent themselves to their colonizers in ways that engage with colonizers' terms while also remaining faithful to their own self-understandings. This paper extends Pratt's conceptualization of autoethnography and describes how it may be used to inform field research in transcultural settings in the formerly colonized world. Drawing from research in a village in northern Pakistan, we argue that approaching fieldwork with an "autoethnographic sensibility" can yield important epistemological, methodological, and political insights into our research practices. The paper concludes by suggesting that these insights extend beyond a postcolonial, or even cross-cultural, research context, to inform more general debates in human geography about how to achieve a critical and reflexive research practice. **Key Words: autoethnography, methodology, field research**, **Pakistan**.

Introduction

Recent work in postcolonial studies has drawn social scientists' attention to the continuing effects of colonial discourses and structures of domination on contemporary cultures and societies. We have come to realize that a postcolonial perspective is less "about being beyond colonialism as about attending to the social and political processes that struggle against and work to unsettle the architecture of domination established through imperialism" (Jacobs 1996, 161). With this awareness come two central responsibilities: to identify and analyze the lingering effects of colonialism, and to contribute to processes that dismantle those effects. These responsibilities pose difficult challenges for those of us who work in ostensibly postcolonial contexts at home or abroad, because they implicate both what we study and how we conduct our research. Many scholars have pointed out that academic research practices, especially in cross-cultural contexts, have relied extensively on remnant colonial discourses and structures of domination for access to research subjects, efficacy of data collection, and legitimation. Researchers situated in metropolitan academic institutions, but working with historically subordinated groups, are heirs to "the ways in which [colonial] discursive formations worked to create a complex field of values, meanings and practices through which the European Self is positioned as superior and non-Europeans are placed as an inferior, but necessary, Other to the constitution of that Self" (Jacobs 1996, 13). This inheritance—especially to the extent that it is acknowledged by our research subjects-provides many practical advantages in the field, not least a comfortable position from which to imagine ourselves as transcultural knowers and our subjects merely as "Native informants" (Spivak 1999). Our efforts to dismantle colonial discourses and structures of domination must therefore include—and perhaps begin by—applying a critical postcolonial perspective to our own research practices.

One potentially useful, but as yet underanalyzed, tool for engaging in a more critically postcolonial research practice is Mary Louise

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Pratt's conceptualization of autoethnography (Pratt 1992, 1994, 1999). Pratt uses the term to refer to those instances where members of colonized groups strive to represent themselves to their colonizers in ways that engage with colonizers' terms while also remaining faithful to their own self-understandings. Autoethnography thus describes a particular mode of transcultural interaction by members of subordinate groups whose subjectivities are forged in the context of cross-cultural relations of domination. The term transcultural interactions refers to the range of discursive and material interactions that occur when cultural groups, often in "highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (e.g., colonized and colonizer) engage in sustained contact (Pratt 1992, 4). Following Ortiz (1995) we use transculturation as an alternative to the reductive concepts of acculturation and deculturation to describe the process whereby members of each group select and invent from materials transmitted to them from the other group through the relations of contact (see also Pratt 1992, 1999; Castañeda 1996; Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffen 1998). While interactions between colonizers and colonized provide the clearest example of the asymmetries of transcultural relations, these are also apparent in relations between tourists and porters, and between researchers and their "Native" subjects.

Our purpose in this article is to extend Pratt's treatment of autoethnography, in order to argue in favor of what we call an autoethnographic sensibility when conducting research in situations of transcultural contact. The paper begins by describing briefly the research context within which we have come to appreciate the heuristic usefulness of autoethnography, followed by a more detailed explanation of how we understand the concept. We then focus on David's work in Shimshal, a small community in northern Pakistan, in order to trace some of autoethnography's potential implications for research practice in terms of epistemology, methodology, and politics. The article concludes by outlining ways that the heuristic value of autoethnography extends beyond explicitly postcolonial, or even cross-cultural, research settings to inform efforts throughout human geography to build critical reflexivity into the research process. It is worth noting before proceeding that here we focus solely on the advantages of an autoethnographic sensibility, as they emerged from our consideration of David's research experiences in Shimshal. Our efforts to understand Kathryn's subjects-and research interactions—in autoethnographic terms lead to a more ambivalent set of conclusions. We discuss these in a "Commentary" that follows the present piece and that was written at the same time (Besio and Butz 2004). We have structured our reflections this way in order to stress that while autoethnography can be a useful research heuristic, its applicability may be highly variable.

Context

The two authors—both white North Americans—are engaged in separate, but overlapping, ethnographic research projects in different small villages in areas of northern Pakistan that were, until 1947, remote and indirectly ruled parts of England's colonial empire in India (see Dani 1989). David has worked in Shimshal, Ghoial (formerly part of the princely state of Hunza), since 1988, first on an analysis of the influence of international development interventions on community-level social and political organization and, since 1995, on the place of portering (carrying loads for trekkers) in the village's social and economic structure. The latter project is a component of a larger study of portering labor relations throughout northern Pakistan (see MacDonald and Butz 1998). Kathryn's research is on the geographies of women's lives in the village of Askole, Baltistan, and part of the same study (see Besio 2001). In her research project, she situates women and children within the context of portering, a field of relations from which they may be physically absent because they do not porter, but which has effects on their constitution as subjects. Despite important dissimilarities between our experiences and social-situatedness in the field, we are both preoccupied with exploring transcultural interactions, understanding local ("Native") experiences, and tracing the colonial roots of contemporary cross-cultural social relations.

Not surprisingly, in neither Shimshal nor Askole has a half-century of Pakistani independence erased the memory and institutional traces of British colonialism and its transcultural effects. Indeed, some of these effects are reproduced in the Northern Areas' current social, economic, and political relations with lowland Pakistan (see Kreutzmann 1995; Stellrecht 1997). Both communities remain firmly subordinate in a wide-ranging set of transcultural discourses and material practices, which are rooted in colonialism, but which continue to circulate globally today (portering is one such discursive formation, but so are "development," "globalization," etc.). Moreover, in both Shimshal and Askole, our subjects attribute to us some of the power of the colonizer, as well as other characteristics they associate with colonial domination (see Besio 2001; Butz 2001). We agree with our subjects' assessment of us and have no wish to euphemize the assessment or deny its truth. At the same time, our field experiences also help us realize that the local effects of these global discourses are contingent and variable. The many guilty opportunities to observe, question, represent, and otherwise disrupt the lives of our participants provided by our situation as Western researchers and heirs to colonial power cannot be disentangled from a wide range of complications, ambivalences, ambiguities, and resistances that inhabit the research site. As we shall demonstrate, our research subjects are far from impotent locally, although they do vary widely in terms of their access to the resources of power.

In both communities men typically have greater access to the social, cultural, and material resources of power than women. This is complicated considerably by a person's age, the social and economic position in the community of his or her household, his or her position within a household, education, and occupation, and so forth. The scale at which power relations are constituted is also important. Women's power is usually greatest in specific and often transient microspatial and social contexts and diminishes as the scale increases, first to the village, and then beyond the village (i.e., those scales at which transcultural relations of power become important). The same is true for men, but to a lesser extent and with considerably more variation within and among rural communities.

In general, most Shimshalis are better positioned in a field of transcultural power relations than are most residents of Askole. Shimshal is a larger village than Askole (Shimshal has 110 households; Askole has 50), with more cultivated land per household and larger pastures, and therefore greater subsistence security. Its in-

habitants are Ismaili Moslems (whose spiritual leader is the Aga Khan) who have eagerly subscribed to a variety of educational, cultural, health-related, and infrastructural programs promoted by the Aga Khan Development Network. One result of this involvement in formal development initiatives is that Shimshalis (both men and women) have more formal education than most non-Ismaili residents of the region. This has enabled many Shimshalis to work at salaried jobs outside the community (often for international development agencies) and has increased the community's ability to communicate effectively and persuasively with powerful foreign and Pakistani outsiders. Community members have honed their competence in a transcultural idiom in a 20-year struggle to resist plans to convert much of their territory into a limited-use national park. In the process they have gained confidence and respect as effective transcultural communicators (see Butz 2002a; Ali and Butz 2003), Askole, whose inhabitants are Shia Moslems, has benefited less from Aga Khan development programs, has much lower literacy rates, and participates in the regional economy mainly through the provision of trekking porters and unskilled manual laborers. As the last permanent village en route to the Baltoro Glacier and K2 (Pakistan's highest mountain peak), Askole's continual involvement in portering for foreigners stretches back to the colonial period when portering was treated as a form of obligatory labor (see MacDonald 1998). Shimshalis were also required to provide portering labor for colonial era explorers, but much less frequently, and in a less brutally oppressive colonial context than pertained in Askole (see Dani 1989 for a description of the different local colonial regimes in Hunza and Baltistan). Portering has become a significant source of income for Shimshal only since the development of Pakistan's adventure tourism sector in the 1980s (see Butz 2002b). Many Shimshali men also work in other aspects of the trekking and climbing industry, as guides, lead climbers, high altitude porters, and office personnel. This diversification has placed Shimshal more favorably in a range of transcultural interactions and has allowed the community to escape more fully than Askole from colonial and contemporary travel discourses, which often portray the rural residents of northern Pakistan as natural beasts of burden (see Butz 1998; MacDonald 1998).

David's main research subjects in Shimshal village elders, trekking porters, and young formally educated social activists—are among the community's most accomplished transcultural actors. Conversely, the women and girls who are Kathryn's research subjects in Askole have little access to direct interactions with nonlocals and few material, social, and communicative resources to manage those interactions to their benefit. In short, David works with a group of highly skilled, transcultural communicators in a community which is quite well positioned to manipulate some transcultural interactions to its advantage, while Kathryn's research participants are among the most subordinated members of a community whose overall access to transcultural resources of power is relatively low. We raise these contextual issues because they help explain why an autoethnographic sensibility seems especially pertinent to David's research in Shimshal, and perhaps less applicable to Kathryn's research in Askole.

Autoethnography

There are two quite different understandings of autoethnography. First, and most commonly, autoethnography is understood as "the process by which the researcher chooses to make explicit use of [their] own positionality, involvements and experiences as an integral part of ethnographic research" (Cloke, Crang, and Goodwin 1999, 333). According to this definition, autoethnography is something a researcher does, a particular way of doing ethnography self-reflexively in the research process (Ellis and Bochner 1996).

In this article, we are more interested in the second conceptualization of autoethnography, which we borrow from Mary Louise Pratt (1992, 1994, 1999). In her book Imperial Eyes (1992, 7, emphasis in original) Pratt says autoethnography

refer[s] to instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer's own terms. 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 . . . autoethnography involves partial collaboration with and appropriation of the idioms of the

In a more recent article she offers more specificity:

Autoethnographic texts are not, then, what are usually thought of as autochthonous or "authentic" forms of self-representation Rather they involve a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or conqueror. These are merged or infiltrated to varying degrees with indigenous idioms to create self-representations intended to intervene in metropolitan modes of understanding.

—(Pratt 1994, 28; emphasis in original)

We read the following implications into Pratt's definition. Autoethnography is not something researchers do, but something their research subjects do that they may want to study. It is an intentional process leading to an intentional representation, which may, of course, have unintended effects. The intent is to strategically alter the way an audience of dominant outsiders understands the subordinate group, and beyond that, to push back to some extent against the shove of domination. Thus, it has strategic ambitions beyond simple translation. It is an inseparable mix of accommodation and resistance: accommodation in terms of idiom, resistance in terms of at least some of its content. The definition describes the "ideal type" of one way groups occupying subordinate positions in particular discourses express themselves to representatives of groups occupying dominant positions in those discourses.

In the community of Shimshal it is possible to identify several sets of representations that conform closely to the ideal type. The best example is a document the community produced to describe their Shimshal Nature Trust (Shimshal Nature Trust 1999). In an attempt to garner international support for their fight against efforts to turn their pastures into a national park, the community crafted a document that used a developmentalist and conservationist idiom complete with tables and maps—selectively to describe their indigenous nature stewardship practices. They then circulated the document via the World Wide Web. (It is worth noting that David was involved both in drafting the document and circulating it on the Internet; we will return to his involvement in our discussion of research politics.) What Shimshalis are engaged in here is "the struggle for interpretive

power" (Jean Franco paraphrased in Pratt 1999, 39): the necessity to "produce oneself as a self for oneself" simultaneous "to produc[ing] [one]self as an 'other' for the colonizer" (Pratt 1999, 39). What motivates Shimshalis in this endeavor is not purely psychological or even discursive, but rather a set of material global/local struggles similar to those Pratt thinks inspire autoethnographic endeavors more generally. She says,

What peoples are struggling for now, as indeed in the earlier periods, is not the hope of remaining in pristine otherness. That is a Western fantasy that gets projected on indigenous people all the time. Rather, people are very clear that they are struggling for self-determination, that is, significant control over the terms and conditions under which they will develop their relations with the nation state, the global economy, the communication revolution, expansionist Christianity, and other historical processes.

-(Pratt 1999, 39)

We think there is value in identifying documents like the one produced by the Shimshal Nature Trust, and understanding them as autoethnographic, but that is not our main argument. Our point is not to categorize indigenous self-representations as either autoethnographic or not-autoethnographic, but rather to be attentive to, respect, analyze, and indeed celebrate, the potential autoethnographic characteristics of all indigenous self-representations. What we are advocating, in other words, is an autoethnographic sensibility—an attentiveness to the autoethnographic characteristics of things that are going on in our research settings.

In order to avoid misunderstanding, it is worth emphasizing that we are not attempting to offer a new way of understanding ethnographic practice. Rather, we see autoethnography as a concept-tool that can help us sharpen our ability to practice understandings that are already well theorized in ethnography and post-colonial studies and, indeed, in geography. This will become clear in the following brief descriptions of three main ways that autoethnography has informed David's research practice in Shimshal.

Epistemology

The first way that an autoethnographic sensibility has informed my research practice is in terms of epistemology; the other ways stem

from that. No matter how sensitive we are as field researchers, we cannot seem to get around the fundamental problem that our job is to represent our research subjects, and that representing something inevitably establishes or enacts a power relationship; that is (to paraphrase Foucault 2000, 340), the act of representing someone acts upon—or intervenes in their "possible or actual future or present actions." This has serious implications for our ambitions to develop a postcolonial practice and politics of research. At its core this is an epistemological issue: Our acts of representation settle the mantle of knowledge producer on our shoulders, while our research subjects become the objects of knowledge, or at best, "Native informants" (see Spivak 1999).

Ethnographers, postcolonial theorists, and others, have grappled extensively with this problem, and many contemporary field workers are sensitive to it. But in my experience, it is very difficult consistently to practice a theory of research subject as knowing subject, given the transcultural discourses and practices in which we circulate and which circulate in us. I think that a sensitivity to autoethnographic expression can help me be truer to a lived recognition of my research subjects as knowing subjects and transculturally knowing subjects—as I conduct research and develop representations. This is a small but important claim. For example, when I listen to trekking porters in Shimshal use the idiom of European travel literature to tell tourists about Shimshalis' involvement in the European "discovery" of their territory, I find the heuristic of autoethnography to be a practically more sophisticated way to understand the "speaking subject" of those representations, than, for instance, Bhabha's notions of hybridity or mimicry (1983a, 1983b, 1984, 1985), or Scott's conceptualization of everyday resistance (1985, 1990; see Butz 2002a for a discussion of the ways Scott and Bhabha treat subjectivity). The autoethnographic subject occupies, I think, a space between the sense Scott gives of an autonomous humanist subject (see Mitchell 1990), and Bhabha's tendency (finally) toward a fully colonized colonial subject. Mimicry and hybridity, as Bhabha conceives them, are defensive subject positions that, even as they disrupt colonizers' knowing positions, nevertheless remain fundamentally neurotic (see Parry 1987; Loomba 1991). Autoethnography imagines a more proactive and self-confident—but no more autonomous—subjectivity. As Pratt (1999, 47) states, autoethnography "involves encounters where [indigenous populations] have to break open traditions of denial and trivialization and to force dialogue in which many [Westerners] would not willingly engage." She goes on to anticipate that "in the process something very powerful often happens: White participants come to experience knowledge not as power but the way indigenous peoples have often experienced it: as pain," and, I would suggest, indigenous peoples may come to experience knowledge as power in a transcultural field (1999, 47). I think this way of framing the relationship between subjectivity and transcultural knowledge (for both Natives and researchers) is a useful epistemological position on transcultural knowledge production from which to build research practice.

Methodology

An autoethnographic sensibility, and its epistemological implications, can also help inform our methodology, if by methodology we mean the guidelines we use to frame appropriate research questions, determine what constitutes adequate evidence, and collect useful data. If postcolonial inquiry is to go beyond understanding the continuing effects of colonialism and engage actively in processes that work to create a past-colonial future (one in which the archetypal moment of transcultural relations is no longer colonialism; see McClintock 1995), it has first to recognize and name those effects. One useful place to direct this sort of inquiry is on the autoethnographic process—the process whereby our research subjects intentionally create representations that deliberately both acknowledge and unsettle the lingering social, political, and representational effects of colonial domination.

Focusing our inquiry in this way may alert us to clearly autoethnographic representations, like the ones I described above for Shimshal. More importantly, it calls our attention to the autoethnographic characteristics of a wide range of representations and the processes involved in constructing them. I think this methodological focus on autoethnographic representations can serve as a useful antidote to our lingering tendencies to privilege more autoch-

thonous forms of self-representation as somehow more authentic and less corrupted than less autochthonous (transcultural) ones. We must avoid these tendencies, because they mutate easily into an epistemology of research subject as Native informant, rather than research subject as transcultural knower.

There is a tendency, for example, among foreign visitors to Shimshal to deride some Shimshalis' frequent references to well-known colonial-era travelogues in their descriptions of the community and its history to foreigners (the most commonly cited texts are Schomberg 1936; Shipton 1938; and Younghusband 1904). This borrowing from familiar European texts is perceived by visitors as evidence of the community's loss of an authentic indigenous connection with its past (or, perhaps, merely a loss of confidence) or as a sort of awkward mimicking white/celebrity name dropping. I have been tempted by these interpretations myself at those times when what I thought I needed most was a reliable and autochthonous Native informant. But when I began to attend more carefully to the context of these citations, I realized that they were often carefully placed claims to transcultural knowing. They are demonstrations of competence in a Western idiom, of an awareness of Western renderings of the community, and of a willingness to engage with these renderings in the ongoing effort to re-create themselves as selves for themselves at the same time as producing themselves as an other for their other (Pratt 1999, 39). The social context of these references to Western exploration texts also demonstrates some Shimshalis' sensitive appreciation of the ambivalences and anxieties of contemporary adventure travel. Citations such as these are often used gently to remind foreign visitors of the guilty similarities between a colonial mode of travel/interaction (as described by their porters) and a tourism mode. They may sometimes, as a result, serve as interventions in the process whereby foreign visitors come to experience their porters' knowledge-which has become their own—as the sharp pain of self-recognition.

A focus on the methodological implications of autoethnography has helped me think through three additional characteristics of the transcultural research field I work in. First, it directs me to listen to the silences that remain in autoethnographic representations, to ask the

question: Whose knowledge remains subjugated in these strategic and often formalized attempts to engage strategically in the idiom of the dominant other? In Shimshal a coalition of young educated men and traditional male elders has claimed responsibility for producing the community's official autoethnographies. While this group is undoubtedly guided by a strong sense of responsibility to the interests of their constituents, their autoethnographic expressions nevertheless reflect transcultural understandings that are often at odds with the experiences of less privileged members of the community. Those Shimshalis with little power within the community, especially if they lack autonomous access to an audience of outsiders, have a very quiet autoethnographic voice. One outcome of this uneven field of autoethnographic authority has been the emergence of a strategic and formal autoethnography among community elites, and a more opportunistic and ephemeral tactical autoethnography among the men who work as trekking porters. These men, despite their lack of status in the community, have the chance to develop familiar and sustained interactions with foreigners. Porters' tactical autoethnographic expressions complement the strategies of community elites in some ways, but also answer back to them (Butz 2001). Many other Shimshalis may not have first-hand access to even a tactical autoethnography. As autoethnographic expressions become more constrained, and opportunities for contact diminish, what remains are the various practices of everyday resistance described by James Scott as hidden transcripts (1990). These hidden transcripts of resistance may be understood as the infrapolitics of autoethnographic expression, as well as a local politics in itself.

Second, we must attend to the ways that we, as researchers, are an audience to which autoethnographic representations are directed. Methods texts often give ethnographic field workers the advice to receive information from our Native informants with a mixture of trust and suspicion—trust that they are providing us with some slice of indigenous life/meaning, tempered by suspicion that they are telling us what they want us to hear or what they think we want to hear. A sensitivity to autoethnography suggests that these are mutually constitutive, rather than competing (or alternative), elements of transcultural knowledge production. It is in the interplay among these (only analytically separate) aspects of self-presentation that selves are produced as selves for the self, and others for the other (see Butz 2002b). To the extent that researchers are imbricated as an attentive audience in this process of autoethnographic knowledge production, we have a responsibility to become autoethnographers ourselves in the other sense of the concept, that is, to engage in "the process by which the researcher chooses to make explicit use of [their] own positionality, involvements and experiences as an integral part of ethnographic research" (Cloke, Crang, and Goodwin 1999, 333). An important objective of this autoethnography will be to interrogate our own constitution (and self-presentation) as a limited set of resources that our research subjects use productively in their efforts at transcultural self-presentation. This sort of exercise foregrounds our very practical, field-level interventions in the ways subalterns speak transculturally. In effect, it helps us expand our representational preoccupations back from the site of "writing the other" (the office) to the site of our interventions as an audience/limited resource in our research subjects' transcultural enunciation of self (the field).

A third, and closely related, issue is how researchers are involved in the production, dissemination, and re-production of autoethnographic expressions. That consideration is dealt with best in a brief discussion of potential political implications of an autoethnographic sensibility.

Politics

If it is true that the concept we are terming autoethnography begins to characterize our research subjects' most deliberate attempts to engage, on something like their own terms, with the globally circulating discourses that underwrite their subordination, then part of our politics of research may be to facilitate these attempts and the political project implicit in them. I am well aware of the red flags the word facilitate raises. Facilitation, like representation, enacts a power relationship that may have a variety of oppressive effects. On the other hand, power relations open up "a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions," beyond simple constraint (Foucault 2000, 340). If an autoethnographic sensibility helps us to recognize our subjects as transcultural knowers, then it should be possible for us to respect the productive potential our research subjects are able to perceive in their interactions with us and also to follow and support the direction they set in their autoethnographic projects.

Beyond what I said already in terms of epistemology and methodology, supporting our subjects' autoethnographic endeavors may involve numerous specific interventions. My involvement with the development of the Shimshal Nature Trust provides modest examples of a few of these. First, Shimshal's autoethnographic elite felt their efforts to convince an international audience of the community's ability to manage its natural environment autonomously would be more effective if the Shimshal Nature Trust were written in a developmentalist and environmentalist idiom. They created a space for me to assist the community express itself using language they found appropriate for this particular construction of themselves. Second, I was able to use my access to the India Office Library and Pakistan's National Documentation Centre (and the relevant archival skills) to gather Western archival evidence in support of the community's historical claim to their territory. Third, community members identified me as a potentially useful agent for the dissemination of the Trust document—and their struggle more generally—to audiences they would otherwise have difficulty reaching: on the Internet, at conferences and in publications in the West. I have also joined community members in presenting their autoethnography at conferences and workshops in Pakistan. A fourth thing I have been trying to do, with limited success, is write up my own research in ways that complement, and harmonize with, Shimshal's formal autoethnographic representations. That means finding ways to construct my empirical and theoretical representations in support of community members' self-representations (rather than merely vice versa, as is often the case) and in recognition of their constitution as transcultural knowing subjects. I understand the present paper as a part of that effort (see also Butz 1998, 2001, 2002a, 2002b).

These interventions are not without their complications. Nor am I suggesting that the concept of autoethnography leads necessarily to strategies that are more innovative or productive than those employed by other researchers in transcultural settings. What an autoethnographic sensibility has helped me to do, however, is to understand these interventions as part of a coherent politics of research, with identifiable links to an explicit epistemological and methodological stance, as outlined above.

Conclusion: Autoethnography, "Betweenness" and Critical Reflexivity

Our thinking in this paper has been guided by the social, historical, and methodological preoccupations of our own research. Thus, we have followed Pratt's example in imagining autoethnography primarily as a transcultural practice of representation characteristic of subordinate groups living in formerly colonized territories in the developing world and what we have termed an "autoethnographic sensibility" as most useful for interrogating and enhancing specifically ethnographic research practices. It is important to note, however, that asymmetrically constituted transcultural interactions are not unique to former colonies or to ethnographic research approaches. Many geographers study historically subordinated "others" within their own Western societies, often in research circumstances (ethnographic or otherwise) that risk reproducing existing transcultural power relationships (Katz 1994; Nast 1994; Staeheli and Lawson 1994; Elwood and Martin 2000). We think that an autoethnographic sensibility could be applied fruitfully to those research contexts. Beyond that, autoethnography provides a creative take on three general issues that pertain to all research with human subjects. The first is how to recognize ontologically and analytically the subjectivity of our research subjects and how not to end up treating them as the equivalent of Spivak's "Native informants," pieces "of material evidence, once again establishing the Northwestern European subject as 'the same" (Spivak 1999, 113). The second central issue addressed in our treatment of autoethnography is how to detect and understand the implications of our involvement in our subjects' world for their world and for the information we get from them. This is a case of coming to terms methodologically and analytically with the fact that we become part of our

subjects' social world and that this is reflected in what becomes our data (see Butz 2001). The third issue is how to organize our research in ways that support our research participants' projects of self-representation and selfdetermination in the full sense of both terms.

Each of these issues is crucial to developing a specifically postcolonial research practice motivated to dismantle the lingering effects of colonial discourses and structures of domination. They are also central to the more general problem of coming to terms with Heidi Nast's candid assertion that "extreme power differentials are the norm when working with oppressed groups; it is what we begin with" and the conclusion she draws from that: "guilt that centers merely on the existence of this inequality and not on how the inequality can be transformed is therefore unproductively paralyzing" (1994, 58). The notion of betweenness provides one possible route to meeting the challenge Nast poses. According to Cindi Katz (1994, 67; emphasis in original), "at this historical moment and in all geographical sites of research, it is crucial that social scientists inhabit a difficult and inherently unstable space of betweenness . . . in order to engage in rhetorical, empirical and strategic displacements that merge our scholarship with a clear politics that works against the forces of oppression" (see also Katz 1992). As England (1994, 86, emphasis in original) says, "we do not conduct fieldwork on the unmediated world of the researched, but on the world between ourselves and the researched." An autoethnographic sensibility, which includes a recognition of our research subjects' struggle to create themselves for themselves while also creating themselves for us, may be one way to approach that space of betweenness, or "third space" (see Bhabha 1990; Pile 1994).

Another way that geographers have responded to the problem Nast describes is with the notion of reflexivity, defined as "self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher" (England 1994, 82, emphasis in original; see also McDowell 1992; Schoenberger 1992). Pamela Moss (1995, 445) describes reflexivity as "permit[ting] us to position our own involvement in the production of knowledge, in the practice of science, in the politics of knowing and doing." We think that attention to the autoethnographic characteristics of our partici-

pants' representations of themselves may help researchers to achieve some of the objectives of critical reflexivity, but without the degree of self-absorption implicit in the concept of reflexivity. By shifting the focus of reflexivity from ourselves as researchers to our subjects' strategic and always politicized engagement with us as researchers and powerful "others," autoethnography helps us to position ourselves in relation to our subjects' involvement "in the production of knowledge, in the practice of science, in the politics of knowing and doing" (Moss 1995, 445), with less risk of shifting the focus of our research to ourselves.

Finally, this partial refiguring of critical reflexivity may place us in a better position to organize our research in support of our participants' self-representation and self-determination, while simultaneously reminding us that too strong an insistence that our "work has direct benefits to the participants" has the effect of once again "elid[ing] their subjectivity" (Katz 1994, 70). Autoethnography is a useful heuristic for imagining that our participants also have research practices (i.e., methodologies) that are formed in relation to ours, but that serve somewhat different purposes. To paraphrase de Certeau's (1984, 26) notion of "la perruque," these practices may be understood as participants' own work disguised as work for the researcher. One useful political goal for researchers may be to organize our research practices in ways that are sensitive to, and enable, the opportunities participants see in our research to achieve their own purposes—a politics more of yielding than of providing.

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