

Sharing in ritual effervescence: emotions and empathy in fieldwork

By Géraldine Mossière (University of Montreal)

In this paper I explore how the anthropologist's mobilisation of emotions during fieldwork might position her in relation or in opposition to her informants, leading her to share or to resist the ritual experience. I will argue that a circumstantial empathic stance (*Einfühlung*) may be the only way to grasp the experiential and embodied dimensions of religious behaviours. By constantly monitoring oneself in order to maintain some distance from the field, this methodological approach involves an ongoing dialectic of relative involvement between the mere observation of an unfamiliar object on the one hand, and participation of the inner self in the field on the other hand. Getting access to the congregation's religious emotions through those non-verbal components to ritual leads to other ways of producing knowledge through informal and unintentional communication, which replaces spoken communication.

My methodological pleasure is not founded on the dynamics of difference and lack, but rather on sameness. Yet even in this sameness, there can be a radical disjuncture: a disjuncture that emerges from an ability to see through, and beyond, and under, and over. Actually, it's not a bad place to be. It gives you an incredible sense of freedom. There is, naturally, a bit of lack, in the sense that I am not what you might call a true devotee. Such a lack, however, keeps me in a pleasurable state of suspension, avoiding true closure with the Church. It is in this open place that I can encounter an alien religious world, as familiar as it may be to me. (Boisvert 2006:15)

(The question of) *Verstehen* and ritual effervescence in Pentecostal cults

What strikes one as particularly appealing about ceremonies in new religious movements, is their strong ritual fervour (Corten 1995, Fer 2005). In the case of Pentecostal groups in particular, religious rituals are characterised by a typical effervescence, that is a state of deep emotion and excitement. This effervescence seems to renew and validate classical theories about collective and individual motivations behind religious emotions and their role in building social solidarity (Durkheim 1925, Radcliffe-Brown 1968, Turner 1990).

While studying such religious phenomena is far from novel in the social sciences, I have had the opportunity to approach them through a new perspective based on the role of the body and of discourse in altering individual experience and building social cohesion

(McGuire 1990, Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987). During fieldwork in an Evangelical West African Pentecostal congregation based in Montreal (Canada), I observed various ritual techniques used to create an emotional atmosphere seen by participants as a direct manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Emotions induced in this context catalyse religious experiences and inspire a sense of embodying the divine, transforming the convert's sense of self and leading her to abide by a new set of rules with other members whom she will henceforth recognise as brothers and sisters. For Orsi, deep and dense religious experiences 'seem to constitute an increasingly successful arena for the expression of emotions of the modern self and elaborate sacred made flesh corporalization of the sacred embodiment' (2004:2). I argue that the relationship between emotions and religious experience is, in fact, the opposite, and that emotions are ritually constructed in order to induce religious experience as much on a collective level, as on an individual and phenomenological basis. My research aims to identify the ritual mechanisms employed in the creation of this effervescence, as I study emotions and their manifestations among members, considering these as a sign of religious experience.

Since I am not Pentecostal, my study raised a typical Weberian problem of *Verstehen*, that is how to understand the Other's religious experiences and practices while not living them first-hand. I have been challenged to ask myself: How can the anthropologist understand current religious social phenomena and still grasp the religious experience demonstrated by modern believers? How can he or she produce knowledge out of the mere observation of expressions of a religious reality that is deeply embodied? By choosing a methodology based on attending ritual ceremonies, I occupied a position akin to that of members of the congregation. I thus experienced the effects of ritual effervescence on my own feelings and sense of self—becoming, in fact, one of the targets of ritual techniques. This raises the problem of the relevance of data collected by the participant anthropologist, as opposed to the mere observer. Indeed, having to share ritual experiences with the congregation positioned me in an intermediary stance between Otherness and Sameness, a stance I would qualify as 'liminal'.

In this paper, I explore how the anthropologist's mobilisation of emotions during fieldwork might position her in relation or in opposition to her informants, leading her to share or to resist the ritual experience. I will argue that a circumstantial empathic position (*Einfühlung*) may be the only way to grasp the experiential and embodied dimensions of religious behaviours. Following Lutz and White, 'empathy' refers here to the universalistic premise whereby 'all humans have the ability to understand another's emotional state...through the channels of empathic (and usually nonverbal) communication and is conceptualized as either an intellectual understanding or a more direct emotional one' (1986:415). This methodological approach leads to other ways of producing knowledge through non-verbal and unintentional communication, which replaces spoken communication. But first, I will present my fieldwork and discuss how both methodology and data collected by an anthropologist are constantly at stake in the negotiation of one's religious belonging and social status in the community studied.

The community under study: the Communauté Évangélique de Pentecôte (CEP) in Montreal

The CEP's history, membership and organisation

The CEP was founded some ten years ago by the current Congolese pastor, who arrived from Belgium where he previously studied theology. During a prior visit to Quebec, he had a divine vision revealing the province to be the land of his mission. Starting with only a few participants (mainly the pastor's family and his children's friends), the CEP grew rapidly and now attracts some 400 members to a large, recently acquired building.

The church is located in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious neighbourhood in Montreal, and the vast majority of its members are Black immigrants. Most are recent arrivals from the Congo or from Francophone West Africa who have fled the wars and insecurity of the last few years. They are generally well-educated people who left relatively comfortable material conditions to come to Canada, arriving with the precarious status and circumstances of political refugees. The CEP also attracts Black people from a prior wave of immigration to Quebec, mainly Haitian men and women with diverse migration trajectories: some came for economic reasons, others immigrated to join family or to study. Almost all the members of the congregation were raised in one or another Christian tradition, and most members from Africa converted to Pentecostalism in their country of origin, while the Haitian members usually came to Quebec as Catholics and then decided to convert. In most cases, the members came to know of the CEP through their social network and some of them had attended various churches before sticking with this one.

As a religious congregation, the CEP is composed of various ministries, each of which is devoted to a particular task. An example of this is the Ministry of Protocol, which takes care that the Sunday service unfolds in a proper and orderly fashion. Each member is given a role and a particular task in the congregation. The head of the congregation is the pastor, who is in charge of the organisation as a whole.

The CEP's religious activities

The CEP's various units meet and merge together during the Sunday service, which the pastor describes using holistic imagery. In his words, this service is not unlike 'a human being whose different organs transfer strength to the dynamism of the body'. At the CEP, the Sunday service takes place in French and is open to all visitors. It is mainly made up of two liturgical periods. During the first, which is devoted to prayer and worship, the Ministry of Praises leads a sequence alternating between song and prayers. This phase lasts for about 50 minutes, and it is a time for members to sing, dance, and praise God with exuberance and warmth. Rousing music, which often recalls African or Haitian rhythms, drives the worship along. Participants express feelings of joy and sometimes sadness with their gestures: raising their hands, swinging their bodies, turning around and around, or alternatively falling prostrate into their chairs. During this time, some participants might experience altered states of consciousness.

This period of intense emotional effervescence comes to an end when a spiritual leader asks for the attention of participants before preaching for more than an hour. The sermon

is always based on a reading of the Bible and deals with the spiritual values conveyed by the Holy Scriptures. It also always focuses on the social and ethical behaviour of the members of the congregation, providing particularly important guidelines to immigrant members on the paths they should take in their host society. For instance, one sermon I attended dealt with financial credit facilities in North America, presenting them as temptations induced by evil spirits seeking to provoke financial and moral bankruptcy among members. An ordinary service ends with announcements about the community's events. The whole time, the Ministry of Protocol watches over the progress of the service, welcomes new participants, and skilfully channels potentially overflowing emotions in the audience. The Ministry may even exclude members whose behaviour is considered too agitated, which may be attributed to Satan's presence.

Social status and identity during fieldwork: resisting 'going native'

Of all the practice on which the anthropologist reports (with the possible exception of sex), religion is most likely to raise suspicions that the anthropologist has gone native. (Klass 1995:2)

My research in the CEP was conducted over an eight-month period, and was originally based on participant observation. I regularly attended the Sunday services and specifically observed how rituals unfolded and became elaborate productions in themselves. However, in order to document the larger context in which rituals take place, I also attended various activities organized by the congregation. This ethnographic approach led me to participate in weekly informal gatherings in the homes of members, as well as in conferences given regularly by the pastor for religious education. For instance, a homiletic class once offered was aimed at shaping new preachers. It is in these small, informal groups that personal interactions developed more spontaneously. These contacts gave me the chance to interview members of the congregation coming from a variety of immigrant backgrounds, whose roles in the CEP ranged from leaders of services or ceremonies to newly enrolled members.

The warm welcome that the church gave me and my project made field research run smoothly. Nevertheless, this relatively easy access to the congregation should be qualified. The founding of the CEP occurred as part of a larger movement of independent churches that mushroomed in Africa as early as the 1920s, following the earlier arrival of nineteenth-century Protestant European missionaries. Rituals in these churches are generally conducted by young, urban and scholarly pastors, and individual charisma is highly valued (LeBlanc 2003, Mary 2000). At the CEP, the pastor frequently reminded the community of my academic status. He would also emphasise that, as a doctor himself, he knew well how demanding and serious my project in the CEP was. He thus endowed me with symbolic capital, which in turn reflected favourably upon him and the community, as the congregation's proselytising is generally aimed at attracting well-educated members. With regards to the host society at large, the pastor's interest in my research was also rooted in the social recognition that may come from a scientific study conducted by a white, educated academic in a Black immigrant community.

Since Pentecostalism is a proselytising movement, I was always careful to subtly, yet unambiguously affirm my religious position, namely that I am baptised in the Catholic

Church and currently hold agnostic beliefs. However, I only let the pastor and members who asked know about my religious stance regarding their church. The logic behind this approach was to avoid the potential pressure of conversion, while retaining access to the field. As far as ethics were concerned, this seemed to me the most honest way to conduct research on religion. However, I used this approach with caution and restraint, since it could still make some group members uncomfortable. Nevertheless, it appears more mitigated than positions such as David Gordon's (1974), who suggests that anthropologists who study new religious movements should openly announce their personal beliefs and religious identity when entering the field, as a strategy for promoting open interaction with the group under study. While aware that demonstrating one's differing religious beliefs remains a delicate position to hold, he contends that ideologically positioning oneself may be perceived as a form of commitment to fieldwork. Mary (2000) also argues that the conflicts and tensions that this position may entail represent valuable data, which show the group's ability to manage the ideological challenges it may encounter. Equally, it highlights the social and political stakes of religious practices and conversions.

Indeed, the agnostic identity that I announced straightaway led the pastor to categorise me as a 'friend' of the congregation, which is someone who does not belong to the CEP, but visits once in a while. My affiliation and social status within the church was officially consecrated during the course of an initiation ritual. This ended my first Sunday service, when the pastor introduced me to the whole congregation, after which each member personally welcomed me. Ideologically, the congregation is built around a dichotomous configuration marked by insiders and outsiders. The relation of Pentecostals to Otherness is clearly structured around two poles: the Same, who has accepted Jesus in his or her life and who thus belongs to a Pentecostal congregation, and the Other who has not, and who conducts a sinful life. However, a more nuanced classification moderates the CEP's boundaries, by establishing different categories of social belonging to the congregation. For instance, the 'sympathising member' attends services and reunions without having formally accepted Jesus into his or her life. Meanwhile the 'temporary member' is part of the congregation only during her time in Montreal, which is most often before moving to western Canada (as is commonly done among the immigrant groups at hand). I considered my status as a 'friend' of the congregation as the ideal scenario, since it guaranteed access to the field, while allowing me to remain transparent about my interests and presence in the congregation. Nevertheless, the pastor tried to arouse common non-religious references to inspire in me a sense of belonging to the congregation, notably by regularly underscoring my own immigrant profile: 'You are also an immigrant, you understand us!' He was, of course, making reference to my French heritage.

However, throughout fieldwork, the parameters of my presence as a 'friend' proved less clear than official rhetoric initially implied. During interviews as well as informal meetings, participants with whom I spoke usually made remarks indicating that they saw me as a potential Pentecostal. In this regard, the reflections that community leaders presented to me were theologically oriented towards what it means to be a good Christian, and the fate God reserves for those who do not accept Him in their life. At the same time, the members of the congregation frequently tried to sensitise me to the

process of conversion to Pentecostalism, and how it can transform one's life. This constant tension of attempting to switch my status from friend to regular member also structured their narratives. In fact, the data collected, as well as the final ethnography, are end-products of a particular kind of interaction. For Sherif (2001), constantly crossing the boundary between member and non-member is part of the research process, while Tweed (2002) evokes a 'translocative' position. Since the collection of data arose from this particular relation, I interpreted the material as the stakes of negotiation between the role I was ready to assume, and the one that group members were willing to ascribe to me. It clearly illustrated that the identities that the anthropologist has to negotiate in the field are multiple, and as diverse as his or her own social identities and self-perceptions.

Participation and observation: negotiating an oxymoron, adopting a 'liminal' position

If the role of white 'friend' and non-member of the community held certain tensions in my personal encounters with individual members of the congregation, it proved all the more difficult to maintain during high-spirited service gatherings among audiences averaging 150 people. Rituals were punctuated by ecstatic movement, as well as various degrees of altered states of consciousness. Maintaining a neutral and distant attitude in an atmosphere of strong collective expressivity and sometimes startling worshipping behaviour was a challenge, especially in regards to my object of study, which dealt precisely with ritually constructed emotions and the religious experiences they induce.

Throughout the ritual the pastor and various leaders regularly invite participants to sing and dance, invoking emphatic responses with such words as: 'Do you love God?'; 'Clap your hands, jump, God wants you to celebrate Him!'. If members did not actively and visibly participate in contributing to a sense of euphoria, they were likely to get accused of impeding the ritual progress. I therefore felt that I could also be expelled from the service by the Ministry of Protocol, and as such I often felt that my presence was illegitimate and merely tolerated by the group. In this context, the methodology of participant observation seemed somewhat inappropriate, leading me to believe that Favret-Saada (1990) is not wrong to stress that this approach is ontologically an oxymoron. On one hand, mere observation would not enable me to understand the density of the object of study, while the possibility of participating more actively induced a form of commitment to the group that I did not wish to develop. On the other hand, had I accepted Jesus into my life solely for the purpose of fieldwork, could I really live significant religious experiences without sharing the deep convictions that induce them?

In the CEP, religious practice is deeply anchored in ritual life, emotional fervour and embodied religious experience. As a Christian religious movement, one of the variegated offshoots of Protestantism, Pentecostalism is based on a literal reading of the Holy Scriptures and on belief in a direct spiritual relationship between God and believer. However, unlike most Protestant denominations, it also includes ecstatic practices such as speaking in tongues, practices which are seen as direct gifts from the Holy Spirit to individual church members during the service. By contributing to the agitated, unrestrained atmosphere that characterises Pentecostal services, such ritual practices catalyse participants' inner experiences and outer demonstrations of faith. John Wesley,

who is considered to be the founder of Pentecostalism, spoke of a 'religion from the heart'. The believer's external behaviour is therefore unlikely to reflect the whole complexity of his or her experience with the sacred. Subsequently, the mere observation of his or her ritual behaviour, as well as his or her account of the religious experience, risks capturing only the semiotic level of religious life, leaving obscure the internal dimension.

Hence, questions of emotion during religious experience raise the following methodological issues: How can one study the role of emotions in religious experience without experiencing such emotions oneself? Is it possible to passively attend religious services, considering that Pentecostal rituals mobilize outlets of expressivity such as the body, the spirit and emotion? Goulet (1998) argues for radical participation that brings about experiential knowledge. In fact, the Dene Tha group he studies derives knowledge by observing other people, and informally by narratives, leading the group to expect the anthropologist to collect data in the same way. Kulick and Willson also note that 'to experiential ethnographers the self and especially experiences in the field are epistemologically productive' (1995:20).

It goes without saying that during the course of my eight-month fieldwork in this religious community, I was deeply touched, not only by the moving narratives of the believers, but above all by the blissful and ecstatic atmosphere of the celebrations. The hymns, dances, melodies and strong expressivity among ritual participants may indeed easily move any witness of religious ritual. This was reported to me by other anthropologists on visits to the congregation, and experienced by scholars such as Corten (1995) during Pentecostal celebrations in Brazil. In fact, by attending the church, I became the target of ritual techniques that I was trying to identify, leading me to experience deep emotions that were evoked during rituals: I felt joyful and light when the African-style hymns were particularly stirring, but also quite moved by the lyrics, which all deal with the hurdles that pave the way to God, symbolising the difficult migratory trajectory most of the members told me they had to pass through.

I soon realised that resisting such spontaneous reactions would impede me from entering my field. Therefore, I gradually positioned myself in a 'liminal' state, suspended between the circumstantial feeling of Sameness that Pentecostal rituals are able to mobilise by way of warm and endearing rituals, and the implacable awareness of my own Otherness that my agnostic position as an intellectual involves. In fact, I gradually came to identify with the community's ritual activities, while I kept my distance from the broader ideological message that the whole event was meant to transmit. My behaviour in the field was adjusted to changing circumstances, allowing my own subjectivity to define the extent of my participation with the church. This was all in accordance with my receptivity and reaction to ritual activities and techniques. As a result, when hymns, music, or speeches made by leaders touched me, I did not censor my own feelings. I eventually experienced some states of deep joy and grace, sometimes a feeling of communion with my neighbours and other church members. At times I also felt blessed, and just plain happy to be where I was. This methodological choice led me hesitantly to sing the church's hymns and to demonstrate ritual gestures, which were nevertheless limited to clapping hands and sometimes balancing the body. Such participation seemed to me all the more

acceptable in that it demonstrated my respect and value for the community's ritual activities, a prerequisite for conducting fieldwork.

However, being open to the expression of my own emotions also raised issues regarding my distance from the religion and the dogma being studied. As a matter of fact, while hymns and exaltations represent a period of spontaneous emotion during services, bringing about moments of ecstasy and communion, sermons signal a time of listening, absorbing, and embodying the congregation's message. As shown in the CEP and other religious communities (Kertzer 1988, Mossière in press, Turner 1972), ritual effervescence alters participants' frame of perception, which leads them to accept and to incorporate leaders' sermons and new systems of references.

This triggered another set of intense responses in me. If sermons were instructive in deepening my understanding of the congregation's normative message, the rhetorical techniques used also affected me quite seriously. Indeed, as hymns and exaltations stirred spontaneous feelings of love and bliss, sermons that were aimed at channelling those emotions towards prescribed and exclusive goals of incorporating the Pentecostal dogma were more frustrating. As a result, the leader's behaviour often seemed strict and sometimes menacing, the tone appearing coercive and the style authoritative. I felt oppressed by the rigid framework and the sometimes radical ritual techniques. As sermons were abundantly and redundantly developed, they were presented as truths that the leader was handing out. Thus it happened that the Sunday service frequently caused me to feel irritated, with the psychological violence of rhetoric weighing heavily on me. After a few initial weeks, I found myself deeply affected, sometimes shaken and nervous. At first it seemed to me that I could tolerate this rhetorical exercise as part of fieldwork, but as time passed I gradually came to resist it to the point that some Sunday mornings, I wished I did not have to go back.

Although I sometimes felt frustrated and did not subscribe to the ideological message that leaders were transmitting, I still decided to keep my own convictions quiet, unless I was asked about them directly, and to respect the fieldwork in order to report it faithfully. However, this position proved quite difficult in small meetings, when I was occasionally asked my opinion on Pentecostalism's interpretation of Bible verses. For instance, regarding political respect and obedience to state and governmental authority (— Pentecostals usually abide by the known adage: 'Return to Caesar what belongs to Him and to God what belongs to Him'—), I once decided to challenge the community consensus by citing dictatorships and totalitarian regimes. On that occasion, the open and pedagogical reactions I received from leaders came as a relief. I felt that although I was not fully accepted in the CEP, at least ideological resistance was not entirely crushed. This made me feel more comfortable and confident in the congregation.

In sum, as I attended the CEP, sharing ritual effervescence with the congregation's members forged a sort of circumstantial feeling of belonging. This ambivalent stance induced in me a constant swing between emotional polarities, from nearly sharing religious emotions with the congregation's members, to critically resisting and distancing myself from the ritual rhetoric and the ideology it conveyed. Occupying this in-between or 'liminal' place, I felt myself flirting with a native position without ever really embracing it. Inspired by Boisvert (2006), this methodological choice contributes to the

ongoing debate among anthropologists of religion concerning their position while in the field.

Beyond a dialogic relationship: empathy and *Einfühlung*

Ethnographic authority in studies of religious activity faces a serious challenge by those who argue that the uninitiated may never completely understand ritual worship. Theologians such as Proudfoot (1985) continue to question the ability of social scientists to take seriously the beliefs of groups under study. They warn that atheistic scientists who research religious experience are necessarily reductionist (Durkheim being a classic example). According to Stewart (1989), religious phenomena should not only be explained by social, political and historical factors; rather, the experiences of believers, and those of the ethnographer, should be considered. Anthropologists have attempted to deal with these questions in their methodological choices in a variety of ways. In this attempt, very few of them consider conversion to be a method that improves the ethnographic scope, even though it implies adopting the group's cosmology and sharing its lived reality. One notable exception, though, is Jules-Rosette (1975), whose ethnography of the African Apostolic Church illustrates her gradual passage from an observer who participates, to that of a participant who is observing. For her, taking notes and observing religious life is methodologically insufficient, as these do not convey the depth and wealth of ritual experiences, such as emotions that come from expressing one's faith or the feeling of worshipping one's God. Although conversion is considered an unusual method that risks an anthropologist's professional integrity, this methodological choice has opened the way to new and innovative approaches.

A less radical, though related approach, is that of intersubjectivity. Whether one qualifies it as phenomenological or 'experience-near' (Wikan 1991), an increasing number of anthropologists of religion now choose to grasp believer experiences or 'lifeworlds' through an intersubjective methodology, committing their social identity and inner self to their fieldwork (Bowie 2003, Favret-Saada 1977, Meintel 2003). Anthropologists who are part of the religious group they study occupy the double role of being the means of the research, as well as part of the object of study. This approach is based on Rosaldo's (1984) argument, which states that understanding human feelings is impossible through cognitive means alone because they are essentially ineffable. To capture such experiences requires one to live or to have lived experiences that are close to what the Other has lived. Nevertheless, according to Favret-Saada (1977), who studied sorcery in the Bocage, a rural area in Normandy (France), it is less a question of feeling what the Other feels than a question of experiencing empathy in the sense of *Einfühlung*. In German philosophy, *Einfühlung* refers to an understanding so intimate that the feelings, thoughts, and motives of one person are readily comprehended by another. Favret-Saada mentions a fusion,

which mobilizes my own set of images without in any way informing me about those of my partner. [...] The very fact that I accept to occupy this position and be affected by it opens up a specific form of communication with the natives: always an involuntary communication, unintentional, and which may or may not be verbal. (1977:194)

By agreeing to take part in her fieldwork and to become bewitched herself, the ethnographer was brought to share in her informants' experiences, and collected non-verbal and emotional information.

Some anthropologists, however, advocate resisting the temptation of active participation by maintaining a 'dialogical relationship' with their respondents. For instance, Mary (2000) doubts that contemporary concerns for deconstructing knowledge should lead researchers to renounce any presupposition of cultural or methodological alterity. He suggests that researchers should maintain some distance from their field. Others, like Beatty and Watson (1999) or Lutz and White (1986), contend that empathy or the ability to understand phenomenologically is not irreconcilable with emotional distance. Anthropologists can be sympathetic and compassionate (in the Latin sense of 'compassion', to 'suffer with') by simply observing the reality of the Other, rather than entering into this reality.

My own 'liminal' position falls broadly within the scope of this *Einfühlung* approach, but was, of course, not without its own tensions. Resorting to this alternative to more traditional participative methods required specific methodological precautions, and led me to constantly monitor myself in order to maintain some distance from the field. As Tedlock (1991) suggests, ethnographies are as much a product as they are a process of an ongoing dialectic of relative involvement between the mere observation of an unfamiliar object on the one hand, and participation of the inner self in the field on the other hand.

'Come on Sunday and you will see for yourself!' As this invitation was often used to answer my inquiries about religious experience in the church, it led me to gauge the extent to which the 'liminal' stance I chose, being neither fully an outsider nor a full member of the CEP, was significant to my data collection. Did it grant me special access, or did it allow me to reach a deeper understanding of the Pentecostals' ritual emotions? It is more and more recognised that emotions felt by respondents and by the ethnographer herself may impact on the scientific process and provide information about the object of study, transcending usual distinctions between cognition and emotion that are characteristic of Western thought. For instance, after exploring the Balinese conception of feeling-thinking, Wikan contends that 'feelings are essential so that we may appreciate facts of knowledge' (1991:299). Similarly, as Le Breton notes, 'the felt emotion is an activity of knowledge, a social and cultural construction which becomes a personal fact through the clean style of the individual' (1998:9, my translation). In fact, feelings of empathy experienced during fieldwork make it possible to reach other types of knowledge, and to grasp the distinction between communicable knowledge (informative) and kinds of knowledge only learned through tacit experience (formative). During ritual, verbal and non-verbal forms of communication, as much as the ethnographer's experience of the Self, produce knowledge.

What emotions as 'embodied thoughts' say about/to the ethnographer

In the CEP, the fervour of ritual techniques induced in the community guided me through a lifeworld that I had already experienced in other circumstances, such as in music concerts, at sports matches, and so forth. The enthusiasm, feelings of joy, and the impression of being transported in a temporary *epoche*—suspended out of time—were

familiar to me, so much so that I could easily understand the emotions of church members in spite of not grasping specific meanings. My participation aroused a circumstantial feeling of belonging, which catalysed a sort of emotional communion with my neighbours. Eye contact and smiling indicated a sort of complicity to the point where some church members who did not know the specific reasons for my presence considered me a regular member. More than once, I noticed that they perceived a shared experience, and as such we reached a sort of intimacy. This *Einfühlung* approach enabled me to access the congregation's religious emotions through non-verbal components to ritual, and in interviews with members it allowed me to infer understanding beyond the semiotic level of oral accounts. If an anthropologist's emotions in the field are no longer ignored, but increasingly considered a new means of producing knowledge, it raises the question of the authenticity and veracity of our perceptions. Do research participants live ritual performance the same way I do? This presents a problem that is all the more fundamental in social anthropology, as it is our epistemology which is at stake: Can we imagine a field in which, through her own personal experience, the anthropologist becomes her own informant?

While my position of *Einfühlung* allowed me to take part in ritual performance, I could avoid fully embodying the congregation's emotional and eventually dogmatic discourse. Crapanzano (1994) reminds us that emotions are glimpses of the ego that reveal continuity or discontinuity. Nevertheless, he also suggests that we should keep in mind that this temporary conception of self does not inherently revolve around the ego; rather, it enables the ethnographer to evaluate the power of emotions displayed on the social scene. As a result my own emotions—as 'embodied thoughts' (Rosaldo 1984)—during sermons demonstrated, often in spite of myself, personal perspectives regarding the CEP's rhetorical production and social structure (Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990). Through this emotional language, I resisted the ritual tactics aimed at disciplining participant emotions. In fact, I was constantly evaluating the context and the content of the religious message, comparing it to my own points of reference.

Understanding the Other can therefore oblige the anthropologist to position herself as a respondent. This stance eventually led me to challenge my own values, and to turn a mirror inward, where it had until then been turned outward towards the Other. Indeed, this mutual interaction implies that the ethnographic experience influences the anthropologist's identity. Even though I have never intellectually subscribed to the CEP's dogmatic message, the warm welcome I received in the congregation, its members' openness and devotion to my project and to my personal curiosity, as well as their optimistic philosophy, all led me to question my own social identities. While this anthropological project mitigated my agnostic beliefs, the fieldwork experience also inspired a new quest for religious and spiritual understanding (both intellectually and experientially). This, I believe, confirms Rabinow's (1988) observation that one understands oneself only by recognising one's difference.

References

- Beatty A. 1999. On ethnographic experience: formative and informative. In *Being There: Fieldwork in Anthropology* (ed.) C.W. Watson, 74-98. London Sterling, Va.: Pluto Press.
- Boisvert, D.L. 2006. The flirtatious sacred. Paper presented at the Eleventh Annual Graduate Students' Interdisciplinary Conference *Sexy Religion: The Allure of the Transcendent*, Montréal.
- Bowie, F. 2003. An anthropology of religious experience: spirituality, gender and cultural transmission in the Focolare movement. *Ethnos* **68**(1), 49-72.
- Corten A. 1995. *Le Pentecôtisme au Brésil: Émotion du Pauvre et Romantisme Théologique*. Paris: Karthala.
- Crapanzano, V. 1994. Réflexions sur une anthropologie des émotions. *Terrain* **22**, 109-17.
- Durkheim, É. 1925. *Les Formes Élémentaires de la Vie Religieuse*. Paris: Bibliothèque de Philosophie Contemporaine.
- Favret-Saada, J. 1977. *Les Mots, la Mort, les Sorts*. Paris: Gallimard.
- . 1990. About participation. *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* **14**, 189-99.
- Fer, Y. 2005. Genèse des émotions au sein des Assemblées de Dieu polynésiennes. *Archives des Sciences sociales des Religions* **131**, 143-64.
- Gordon, D. 1974. The Jesus people: an identity synthesis. *Urban Life and Culture* **3**, 159-78.
- Goulet, J-G. 1998. *Ways of Knowing: Experience, Knowledge, and Power Among the Dene Tha*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Jules-Rosette, B. 1975. *African Apostles: Ritual and Conversion in the Church of John Maranke*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Kertzer, D.I. 1988. *Rituals, Politics and Power*. New Haven and London: London University Press.
- Klass, M. 1995. *Ordered Universes: Approaches to the Anthropology of Religion*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Kulick, D. and M. Willson. 1995. *Taboo: Sex, Identity and Erotic Subjectivity in Anthropological Fieldwork*. London: Routledge.
- LeBlanc, M. 2003. Les trajectoires de conversion et l'identité sociale chez les jeunes dans le contexte postcolonial Ouest-africain: les jeunes musulmans et les jeunes chrétiens en Côte d'Ivoire. *Anthropologie et Sociétés* **27**(1), 85-110.
- Le Breton D. 1998. *Les Passions Ordinaires: Anthropologie des Émotions*. Paris: Colin.
- Lutz, C. and L. Abu-Lughod. 1990. *Emotion, Discourse, and the Politics of Everyday Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Lutz, C. and G. White. 1986. The anthropology of emotions. *Annual Review of Anthropology* **15**, 405-36.
- Mary, A. 2000. L'anthropologie au risque des religions mondiales. *Anthropologie et Sociétés* **24**(1), 117-35.
- McGuire, M.B. 1990. Religion and the body: rematerializing the human body in the social sciences of religion. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* **29**, 283-96.
- Meintel, D. 2003. La stabilité dans le flou: parcours religieux et identité de spiritualistes. *Anthropologie et Sociétés* **27**(1), 35-64.
- Mossière, G. In press. Emotional dimensions of conversion: an African Evangelical congregation in Montreal. *Anthropologica*.
- Orsi, R.A. 2004. *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Proodfoot, W. 1985. *Religious Experience*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Rabinow, P. 1988. *Un Ethnologue au Maroc: Réflexions sur une Enquête de Terrain*. Paris: Hachette.
- Radcliffe-Brown, A.R. 1968. *Structure et Fonction dans la Société Primitive*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit.
- Richardson, J.T. 1991. Experiencing research on new religions and cults. In *Experiencing Fieldwork: An Inside View of Qualitative Research* (eds.) W.B.S. Shaffir and R.A. Stebbins, 62-71. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- Rosaldo, R.I., S. Plattner and E. Bruer. 1984. *Grief and a Headhunter's Rage: On the Cultural Force of Emotions*. Washington, DC: American Ethnological Society.
- Scheper-Hughes, N. and M.M. Lock. 1987. The mindful body. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* **1**(1), 6-41.
- Sherif, B. 2001. The ambiguities of boundaries in the fieldwork experience: establishing rapport and negotiating insider/outsider status. *Qualitative Inquiry* **7**(4), 436-47.
- Stewart, C. 1989. True speech. *Man* **24**(1), 79-102.
- Tedlock, B. 1991. From participant observation to the observation of participation. *Journal of Anthropological Research* **47**, 69-94.
- Turner, V. 1972. *Les Tambours d'Affliction: Analyse des Rituels chez les Ndembu de Zambie*. Paris: Gallimard.
- . 1990. *Le Phénomène Rituel: Structure et Contre-structure*. Paris: Presse Universitaire de France.
- Tweed, T.A. 2002. On moving across: translocative religion and the interpreter's position. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* **70**(2), 253-77.
- Wikan, U. 1991. Toward an experience-near anthropology. *Cultural Anthropology* **6**, 285-305.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Rita Henderson for revising my English, as well as Ingie Hovland for her constructive and thoughtful comments.

About the author

Géraldine Mossière is currently working on her PhD in social and cultural anthropology at the University of Montreal (Canada). Her thesis deals with French and Quebecer women's conversion to Islam. Following her previous research projects, she also studies new religious diversity in Western and immigrant societies. Her particular interests include anthropology of religion (new Christian movements, Islam and New Age groups), the anthropology of gender, as well as the methodological and epistemological questions raised by the new anthropology at home. She can be contacted at geraldine.mossiere@umontreal.ca