



Full Participation And Ethnographic Reflexivity: An Afro-Brazilian Case Study

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In this article, I explore the conditions of ethnographic knowledge production, with a focus on 'full participation', i.e. an unrestricted affective and relational commitment on the part of the ethnographer doing fieldwork. The very notion of participation raises some questions as to the objectivity of the ethnographic endeavour, as well as to the nature of the knowledge thus produced. The main goal of this article is to show that this knowledge, under specific conditions, is not only scientifically admissible but also likely to shed a different kind of light on the reality studied ethnographically. As I will argue, this can only be achieved through the development of three forms of ethnographic reflexivity. Finally, I will stress the heuristic and epistemic added value of full participation and conclude with a discussion of the place of intuition in ethnographic work and its consequences for the training of today's and tomorrow's anthropologists.

Keywords: Full Participation, Ethnographic Reflexivity; Participant Observation; Objectivity; Afro-Brazilian

Introduction

Reflexivity is still about them. –Raymond Madden (2010)¹

In this article, I explore the conditions of ethnographic knowledge production, with a focus on 'full participation', i.e. an unrestricted affective and relational commitment on the part of the ethnographer doing fieldwork. The very notion of participation raises some questions as to the objectivity of the ethnographic endeavour, as well as to the nature of the knowledge thus produced. The main goal of this article is to show that this knowledge, under specific conditions, is not only scientifically admissible but also likely to shed a different kind of light on the reality studied ethnographically.

I was brought to reflect on this topic by my personal and scholarly involvement in the *candomblé Nagô* or *Xangô de Recife*, an Afro-Brazilian possession cult that I had the opportunity to study over the last fifteen years.² With thousands of followers, the Xangô is one of Recife's most influential Afro-Brazilian religions today³. As a Yoruba initiatic

¹ Qtd in Fasulo (2013: 259).

² *Candomblé Nagô* is the term preferred by worshippers, while *Xangô de Recife* is the popular as well as the academic name.

³ As an Afro-Brazilian modality of cult (among others such as *Candomblé*, *Batuque*, *Culto Afro*, *Umbanda*, *Tambor de Mina*, etc.) the *Xangô* is, on a broader level, part of Afro-

possession cult⁴, each Xangô initiate is assigned at least two African deities called *orixás*, which he needs to ‘feed’ at least once a year with an animal sacrifice. Although all initiates are potential candidates, possession is neither a prerequisite nor a necessary consequence of initiation. But it is undoubtedly the most visible expression of *axé*, the vital force, often understood as ‘life itself’ connecting all beings and things that make up this ontological system (Wafer 1991; Goldman 2007).

I will not have the space here to come back to the circumstances that led me, as early as my first trip to the field in summer 2001, to become ‘phagocytised’ by the initiation process.⁵ For the time being, it is enough to know that holding the position of a novice in the *Xangô* religious system presented to me an opportunity not to be missed, given that my thesis focused precisely on religious learning. What better social position could have I hoped for than the one thus assigned (Favret-Saada 1990)? As I began to take my first steps into the *Xangô* cult, I learned to juggle my two hats – the hat of Arnaud, son of *Ode*, the *orixá* of hunting,⁶ and the hat of Arnaud the anthropologist who had a thesis-writing project underway, which he was very much set on completing⁷.

One of the early lessons of my ‘body and soul’ commitment (Wacquant 2002) to the *candomblé Nagô* initiation process was that this was not a ‘believe’ religion, an orthodoxy *stricto sensu*, but a ‘do’ religion, an orthopraxis very much bent on following the liturgical precepts, as well as a religion of ‘experience’, a ‘phenomenopraxis’ to some extent, constructed on an experiential expertise in the first and third persons –

American religions, which are present today in America as also in various European countries - see for example Frigerio (1997); Oro (1999); Capone (2001-2002, 2005); Teisenhoffer (2015).

⁴ *Xangô*’s origin dates back to the end of the nineteenth century. From being somewhat restrained during the first half of the twentieth century, the cult expanded rapidly throughout the city from the 1940s to the 1970s, thanks to the influence of charismatic cult leaders (de Carvalho 1987).

⁵ I revisit the circumstances of this commitment as well as my trajectory as *Xangô* initiate and possessed in ‘Un anthropologue en transe’ (2007) and ‘Divinités incarnées’ (2015).

⁶ *Orixá* (pronounced ‘orishas’) are Yoruba deities associated with natural elements like rivers, the sea and thunder – or with human activities like hunting and iron-working. Due to the influence of popular Catholicism, the word *santo* (‘saint’) is frequently used as a synonym of *orixá*.

⁷ My initiatic commitment in the *Xangô* is nothing exceptional. Many if not most anthropologists of Afro-Brazilian religions since the very beginning of the nineteenth century are likely to get involved, even if minimally, in liturgical matters, if only for accessing information that only circulate among initiates of the cult. Secrecy is a historical and constitutive element of *Candomblé*’s social and political positioning (Johnson 2002). Among the founders of Afro-Brazilian studies ritually committed in one way or another, let’s mention in passing Edison Carneiro, Ruth Landes, Pierre ‘Fatumbi’ Verger, Roger Bastide or Juana Elbein dos Santos. However, very few of them, if any, decided to honour or at least to ‘confer some dignity’ (Goldman 2003: 450; 2006: 165, 171) to their own experience as a source and/or as an object of anthropological inquiry. Even Gisèle Cossard-Binon, a French anthropologist who became one of the most well-known priestesses of *Candomblé* (*mother-of-saint*) in Brazil, remained extremely discreet about her own *experience* as an initiate and possessed (*rodante*) (1970, 2007). Such attitude is easy to understand given her status as a mother-of-saint, the highest religious status in Afro-Brazilian cults. The epistemological position I defend in this paper is different. I will try to show that the kind of anthropological investigation I suggest is neither compatible with a strictly native (religious) perspective, neither with a cold and distant (scientific) analysis.

as I will later discuss in more detail.⁸ Drawing on my journey from novice to potential initiator, but also from PhD candidate to research professor in anthropology, I will argue in favour of the scientific validity of full participation as ethnographic method – *under specific conditions*. To put it unequivocally, full participation is in no way a panacea for all ethnographic inquiries. I understand it as both a relational attitude towards oneself and the others and a useful methodological toolbox for ethnographers interested in topics such as emotions, the senses, experience or, more broadly speaking, cultural subjectivities. My purpose here is not controversial but to encourage the development of a ‘thicker’ epistemological ground in anthropology, and especially in relation to ethnographic endeavours.

I will first question the notion of ‘objectivity’ in the context of ethnography. At the heart of my argument will be a discussion on the possible ethnographic reflexivity strategies of full participation, arguing that distancing oneself from first-person ethnographic *knowledge* should not be confused with distancing oneself from the persons and affects the ethnographer is dealing with. Finally, I will stress the heuristic and epistemic added value of full participation and conclude with a discussion of the place of intuition in ethnographic work and its consequences for the training of today’s and tomorrow’s anthropologists.

Ethnographic ‘objectivity’ revisited

Objectivity the thing was as new as objectivity the word in the mid-nineteenth century. Starting in the mid-nineteenth century, men of science began to fret openly about a new kind of obstacle to knowledge: themselves. (Daston and Galison 2007: 34)

To be objective is to aspire to knowledge that bears no trace of the knower —knowledge unmarked by prejudice or skill, fantasy or judgment, wishing or striving. Objectivity is blind sight, seeing without inference, interpretation, or intelligence. (Ibid.: 17)

The two quotes above – that come from a beautiful book by Daston and Galison on the history of the concept of objectivity – point unambiguously to the enemy to defeat on our way to scientific objectivity, namely the researcher’s subjectivity. This ‘objectivist’ view of our relation with the world has engendered at least two ‘objectivity’ regimes in contemporary sciences.

The first relies on falsifiability as a criterion for scientificity (Popper 1972). In this regime of objective knowledge production, a statement is said to be falsifiable if there are facts that can prove it to be false⁹. Which amounts to saying that in order to prove said

⁸ When I say that *Xangô* does not fit the definition of an orthodoxy *stricto sensu*, I do not mean that it does not possess a corpus of mythological and cosmogonic references, but rather that it lacks an interest in their transmission. In my two years of fieldwork, I have witnessed straightforward transmission of mythological episodes or cosmogonic views among *Xangô* members only on very rare occasions. Also, whatever individual followers, myself included, ‘believe’ is no matter of real concern for the other followers. In a religion such as *Xangô*, religious expertise is demonstrated through lived experience and is measured firstly by liturgical know-how and knowledge derived from lived experience.

⁹ This is, of course, a very much simplified interpretation of Karl Popper’s definition of falsifiability. It is by no means intended as a philosophical discussion, but rather as a reminder that this is the argument that dominates in the contemporary ‘hard science’ epistemological background.

statement right it is not enough to gather facts that verify it since one could (almost) always find facts that confirm a hypothesis or a theory. On the contrary, it will be deemed false as long as there is even one fact that refutes it.¹⁰ Falsifiability as a regime of objectivity, whose aim is ostensibly the production of universal knowledge, would thus require the use of rigorous experimental methods, based on the control of variables and the reproducibility of results.

It is self-evident that such methodological requirements (falsifiability, control of variables, reproducibility of results) are difficult to fulfil outside an experimental setting. And even more so in the context of *in situ* observational research such as ethnographic studies. If so, should we give up all scientific ambitions in anthropology? Could we envisage another form of objectivity anchored in an empirical approach?

Ethnographic work relies on the production of abductive inferences from particular cases and ideally leads to a plausible truth and/or the development of hypotheses about a specific reality¹¹. To use Passeron's beautiful words, the ethnographic method is based on 'the criterion of empirically-multiplied and semantically-joined exemplifications' and its efficacy can only be measured by 'the effects of knowledge and the effects of intelligibility that it has produced' (Passeron 1991:15). The keyword here is certainly 'intelligibility', meaning that the ethnographer works as a meaning mediator to a reality difficult to grasp in the absence of intimate knowledge of it, of a 'thick description' (Geertz 1973) of its protagonists, its stakes, and its socio-cultural context. *Intelligibility* and *objectivity* are therefore not synonymous.

Without claiming Popperian objectivity, two methodological attitudes or strategies have been used in anthropology for the purpose of attaining a form of, let's say, 'objective intelligibility'. The first one could be called – not without irony – the 'stealth mode' because it makes the ethnographer invisible: no longer present in his own ethnographic accounts, the ethnographer embraces "the view from nowhere" characteristic of a post-Enlightenment approach to knowledge (Lock 1993: 138), a view which is arguably pervasive in the social sciences' (Espírito Santo 2015: 205). And this is precisely the problem with this first descriptive strategy: the line separating a non-situated gaze from the illusion of an omniscient or exhaustive gaze is very fine. The alleged 'objectivity' of this strategy rests on a methodological impossibility, i.e. the 'neutralizing' of the ethnographer's subjective gaze by erasing it from the account. As Fiona Bowie rightly puts it: 'There is no unsituated knowing, no unmediated 'fly-on-the-wall' objectivity. The knower takes to him or herself an object of knowledge with all the limitations and inevitable entanglement of selfhood.' (Bowie 2013: 705)

The second and most frequently used methodological strategy today is emotional detachment, with its two distinct manifestations. One, the ethnographer creates a '*bonne distance*' (right distance) or even a '*regard éloigné*' (view from afar) in relation to the object of his inquiry. According to this methodological attitude, 'objectivity' depends on maintaining an emotional distance from the people studied by the ethnographer, with whom he is nonetheless bound to share quite a few life moments. 'Not too close but not too far either', in the words of Michel Agier (1997), aptly sums

¹⁰ Even if the statement itself is debatable, it remains a philosophical landmark in the development of scientific thinking.

¹¹ An abduction or abductive inference can be defined as an inference to the best explanation resulting from an observation.

up this attitude. Second, there is another kind of emotional detachment, this time aimed not at the other but at the ethnographer himself. In other words, an objective approach requires the ethnographer to be capable of detachment or at least of keeping his own emotions at bay. This second attitude follows the 'classic' view of emotions as disruptive for human reason, hence the need to banish them from the process of objective knowledge production¹².

Both versions of emotional detachment as an 'objectifying' endeavour lend themselves to criticism in several ways. Firstly, much of today's cognitive science and neuroscience research proves that empathy is the basis of social communication. According to Jackson, Meltzoff, and Decety:

Two primary components are consistent across numerous conceptualizations (of empathy): (1) an affective response to another person, which often, but not always, entails sharing that person's emotional state, and (2) a cognitive capacity to take the perspective of the other person while keeping self and other differentiated. (2005: 771).

Empathy is thus an essential capacity that enables understanding and communicating with another person. Is then keeping one's affective resonance at a distance the best strategy to 'objectively' account for the behaviour of others? Similarly, contemporary science acknowledges emotions as a constitutive component of rational thinking and of the decision-making process (Damasio 1995, 1999). Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007) describe brain-damaged patients unable to use their emotions for guiding their own reasoning, or unable to learn from the emotional repercussions of their decision, or even unable to respond emotionally to reactions and solicitations of their social partners. In a word, their '*emotional thought*' was compromised because they had lost their '*emotional rudder*'. Is it then still possible for the ethnographer to claim objectivity by shutting off his own emotions?

If we take seriously – and we do – such findings on empathy and emotions, as ethnographers we are forced to admit that we should concentrate our efforts on a better understanding of our own affectivity rather than try to get rid of it. Fortunately, there is an increasingly rich and convincing literature on rehabilitating the relevance of introspection as a method of scientific inquiry (Vermersch 1994/2011, Petitmengin et al. 2013, Petitmengin 2011). Introspection can in fact count as an 'expert act' and, consequently, can be both taught and constitute a topic of rigorous scientific research (Petitmengin 2014: 196).

So what are the implications for ethnographic methods?

I can think of two pitfalls to be avoided here. First, there is methodological 'affectivism' claiming that only the researcher's subjectivism has truth value as in the case of some auto-ethnographies written particularly in the American postmodernist tradition.¹³

¹² The same attitude still prevails in ethology as Véronique Servais rightly reminds us: 'Much-praised neutrality and objectivity translated as emotional unresponsiveness, inhibited empathy, blocking the process that in everyday life allows us to see animals as embodied consciousness (Wieder, 1980)' (2013: 209).

¹³ In stark contrast with the 'classic' attitude mentioned above, this methodological attitude is often built on a romantic view of emotions seen as the place of a 'uncorrupted, pure and honest' perception of reality, detached from the 'civilization's artificial rationality.' Further, the

Second, there is the persistent claim that objectivity can indeed be achieved through emotional detachment. Contemporary research on emotions bids us to better understand empathy and introspection processes and use this knowledge in our anthropological work. One way to do that, as we will see, is the ethnographer's developing a unique degree of empathic resonance and introspective expertise, which derive their ethnographic validity mostly from the ethnographer's reflexivity during and after fieldwork. What I am suggesting is a methodological alternative based on full participation and requiring from the ethnographer not so much to create an 'objectifying' distance from his hosts or his own emotions but rather from ethnographic knowledge itself, i.e. the knowledge produced and rendered by the ethnographer in the first person.

I choose to go straight to the point and begin with a description of one of my possession experiences,¹⁴ because it both illustrates unequivocally what I understand by 'full participation' and serves as a case in point supporting my discussion of the specific conditions that grant ethnographic admissibility to full participation.

Full participation and ethnographic reflexivity

*Becoming orixá*¹⁵

This is it, it's done! This is it, I did it! I passed the test of the Dékà¹⁶. Júnior surprised me when he called Ode, right there in the middle of the Salão!¹⁷ But then Ode answered him right away! I felt a veil coming down on my consciousness, then the sudden rise of that force that I've felt before, which erases the line separating the animal from the Empress (reference to the Marseilles Tarot card¹⁸), separating the force that keeps the mouth open from the one that pours out of it. Contrary to many accounts by possessed people that I've collected myself, and the traditional established vocabulary, I did not 'switch off' (apagar). For me, it is more like being 'wrapped' in a dream-like state, having a veil over my consciousness that transforms the outer world in a sort of lucid dream in which I see myself doing things... A sort of Leirisian 'lived theatre' where Ode and I are perceived as being one by both the others

capacity to be affected would be the definition of being human and the source of meaning for both the individual and social life (Lutz and White 1986).

¹⁴ This happened during my most recent fieldwork studying *Xangô* cult, in August 2014. For an account of my introduction to being one of the *Xangô* possessed, see Halloy (2007, 2015).

¹⁵ Excerpt from my field notes.

¹⁶ Also known as 'confirmation', this ritual takes place at least 7 years after joining the religious cult as a *iaô*, a novice, and grants the rank of *ebômi*, or elder, as well as the legitimacy to create new initiates. The ceremony consists in presenting the initiate to the community. In most cases, it involves the possession of the candidate by his or her *orixá*.

¹⁷ Júnior is my father-of-saint in the *Xangô*. The *Salão* is a large hall where public *candomblé* ceremonies take place.

¹⁸ Marseilles tarot is not part of *Xangô*'s mythological background, but rather of my relation to my elder brother, who is a specialist of Marseilles tarot. The reference mentioned follows a mail I received a few weeks earlier from him. I later learnt that the female character on the Marseilles tarot card I was referring to was not the Empress but Strength (11th Major Arcana card). Since it was this archetype on which I built my description, I decided to keep it there.

and myself. I have many visual or sound flash memories. But all of them feel like they are contained by some other body than mine, a body that pulsates from inside, a body for which feeling and acting are one, dancing is perceiving the world, feeling it, experiencing it... An imperative force, very much like a heartbeat of the whole body!

I am happy that this happened, that meu pai Ode (my father Ode) answered Júnior's call and I could pass with flying colours this test that had terrified me. I know I still have a lot of growing up to do in the culture of this force. Maybe one day I will switch off like many others. But until then, I know I have an orixá! And he dances through me! Ode is that part of me which led me to candomblé so that I can become a channel for him to express himself.

Today I think that the moment of the 'manifestation' is unique for every candidate to possession, each of us experiences it in his own way and the range of possibilities is much wider than what transpires from the discourses and what the words are able to render. My own way of experiencing it is quite special because I perceive my own lived experience through the lens of 15 years of anthropological research on possession but also of 2 years of practicing daily meditation. My experience cannot, therefore, be identical to that of the cult followers for whom the orixá is the orixá and the possession is his 'manifestation' through a person of his choice. So I cannot change who I am or what Ode is to me. When I put it like this, it sounds very stupid to me! My lived experience of candomblé and of possession is what it is, and it seems to fit perfectly what candomblé expects from its 'children' (the initiated). I am a candomblé child and son of the orixás Ode Arole, Yemanjá Ogunté and Oxum. Having looked from within, I can say it out loud: 'Eu também tenho santo'¹⁹!

What is the epistemological value of data provided by the ethnographer's introspective account of his own experience? I will put forward two hypotheses that will sound counterintuitive to ethnographical common sense. The first is that they are not *more* trustworthy because they come from the ethnographer and therefore are allegedly closer to an 'objective' account (using the 'objectifying' strategies described earlier). An account is what it is: the translation of a subjective relation with the world. The second is that the data are not *less* trustworthy because they come from someone outside the studied culture since the lived experience of the ethnographer was 'validated' by the members of the culture, in this case the *Xangô* religious experts. In sum, while they cannot be waved off, they cannot be taken at face value either – their value for the anthropological endeavour remains ambiguous. How can one make the best of them? What are the conditions for processing introspective data as genuine ethnographic data? My answer: with the help of three forms of ethnographic reflexivity.

Three forms of ethnographic reflexivity

The self in the third-person

The first form of reflexivity is the shift from the self in the first person to the self in the third person. Moving off centre, taking one's distance is not the same as the emotional detachment I described earlier. On the contrary, as Jeanne-Favret Saada has aptly

¹⁹ 'Me too I have a saint!'

shown in her study of witchcraft in the Bocage, this shift requires that the ethnographer should first allow himself to be 'caught' ('prise') (1997), i.e. he is or allows himself to be affected by 'affective intensities' (Favret-Saada 1990) that he dutifully records in his field notes every day. The practice of empathic resonance and introspective thinking will provide the basis for being 'caught' a second time ('reprise') (Favret-Saada 1977), with the advantage of distance in both space and time from the field²⁰. The distance becomes part of the research temporality, meaning that the ethnographer will be able to come back to the description of his own experience and approach it as one among many others, this time detached from the emotions that gave rise to it in the first place. In Jeanne Favret-Saada's work, field notes become the object of a retrospective auto-psychoanalysis, tracking down in her own words, lapsus and actions meaningful or significant affects²¹. Any such exercise might also rely on the ethnographer's developing of some 'technologies of the self' (Foucault 1994), both as the researcher who feels and understands the emotions that stir him and as the writer who puts them into words. As Daston and Galison rightly remind us: 'The mastery of scientific practices is inevitably linked to self-mastery, the assiduous cultivation of a certain kind of self.' (2007: 40).

Writing is thus critical to the process of creating distance, being involved in each of its stages. During the being 'caught' phase, writing records not only the contours of the lived experience but also makes distancing possible for the first time. During the being 'caught' again phase, these field notes become the raw material for analysing the ethnographer's own experience during fieldwork. As we will see, the description of the ethnographer's own experience will complement other field notes and provide the necessary ethnographic material for a comparative analysis. But it might also reveal avenues of research that might have been overlooked in the other categories of collected data (see *infra*).

The self in the second person

A second form of ethnographic reflexivity is to make note of the ethnographer's experience *as perceived by his hosts*. This is what I call the self in the second person since the ethnographer learns how to get to know and interpret his own experiences through the eyes of the other, in this case the very other that he is trying to understand. My own training in possession, as I discuss in detail elsewhere (Halloy 2007, 2015),

²⁰ In suggesting that empathic resonance and introspective thinking provide the basis for being 'caught' a second time ('reprise'), some may say I am wrongly 'psychologizing' Favret-Saada's argument. Marcio Goldman is explicit when he says: 'In the words of Favret-Saada, it is about to be affected by the same forces that affect the native, and not to put yourself in his place or to develop some kind of empathy with him.' (2003: 465, my translation). Affect, he suggests, should be understood as 'affections', not as 'an emotional or cognitive understanding of the affects of others' (Ibid.). If I can only agree with Goldman that occupying a social position is first of all being affected by the same 'forces' that affect the native, we must admit that most 'forces' are social in nature. To be affected thus means, most of the time, being affected by others. Willing it or not, empathic resonance is among the psychological tools we have for understanding and dealing with social interaction.

²¹ I thank Emmanuel de Vienne for drawing my attention to that difference between Jeanne Favret-Saada's and the kind of introspective methods I am suggesting here. Jeanne-Favret Saada's psychoanalytical influence on her ethnographic approach is made explicit and developed in her last book 'Désorcéler' (2009).

has relied mostly on the reactions of religious experts to my own experience as I gradually found out what possession meant, bodily speaking. I will only mention here one such episode. As I was watching an *amasí* ritual involving one of the daughters of *Ode* in a *terreiro* (temple) in João Pessoa,²² I felt a strong shiver in my body. Next thing I knew, one of the elderly ladies sitting next to me put her hand on mine and, in a voice suffused with tenderness but also a hint of mischief, she whispered in my ear: 'It won't be long now, it won't be long...'²³ referring openly to future possession. Now, as a drummer in love with the *candomblé* rhythms, I had participated in *candomblé* ceremonies for almost 20 years, and it had happened to me before to feel shivers, less intense, it's true, which I had then attributed to the musical emotion. What the lady in João Pessoa did was to point it out to me for the first time that I might get 'caught' myself by my *orixá*, something that had never occurred to me until then.²⁴

When cultural experts – in this case, religious experts – identify the ethnographer's experience, it does not mean that they identify it with their own. At the most, they acknowledge it as a legitimate – not faked – experience of possession, shared by an entire category of individuals, namely the possessed and the candidates to possession. The 'content' or '*qualia*' of the experience is by definition idiosyncratic and cannot thus be mistaken for the *process* of the experience, which in this case consisted in a perceptual inference by a priestess seated next to me, made in a given setting (an *amasí* ritual for the same *orixá* as mine) and based on the manifestation of observable psycho-physiological effects (a strong shiver and goose bumps).

This second form of ethnographic reflexivity requires a commitment to an epistemic reciprocity between the ethnographer and his hosts, reciprocity which, in turn, requires that the ethnographer part with the scientific '*quant-à-soi*' (aloofness) typical of the all-seeing-eye attitude. As opposed to being 'caught' and being 'caught' again, the self in the second person type of ethnographic reflexivity is more contingent because it does not depend directly on the ethnographer. Its 'felicity conditions' (Austin 1970) rely both on the ethnographer's need to fill a position in the social system and on the willingness to allow himself to be touched or 'caught' by the affects that come with that position. This heuristic attitude imposes on the ethnographer a certain degree of humbleness. As Alan Bensa elegantly puts it in a quote that I love:

The field researcher who participates in the life of his hosts is less the cunning man in command, who plays pretend all the while remaining, secretly but staunchly, his scientifically aloof self, and more a rather inexperienced pawn in a game whose ramifications engulf and often exceed him (Bensa 1996: 44, our translation).

The stake for the ethnographer is not so much 'pretend play' or 'make-believe' ('*faire comme si*') (Berliner 2013) as it is to fully accept the affective implications of the place assigned to him. In other words, it is more about 'placing himself in the same dispositions' (Dupuis 2015) than claiming a 'temporary dis-identity' (Berliner 2013). Only second-person reflexivity makes it possible to acknowledge ethnographically the sharing of dispositions – and not of the sameness of experience as I have already

²² *Amasí* is a ritual meant to purify the initiate's body and head by washing them with a decoction of wild plants (*folhas*), each deity having his or her own plants, in this case *Ode*, the *orixá* of hunting, who is also my main *orixá*.

²³ '*Não vai demorar, não vai demorar...*'

²⁴ This premonition was to be confirmed during my own initiation, which took place several months after the episode described here.

stressed – by the ethnographer and his hosts. The dispositions to be acknowledged concern the capacity to *share* an experience when and how it is expected. From this perspective, the production of anthropological knowledge arises rather from a pragmatics of action than a hermeneutics of otherness. Rather than rely on a ‘We and They’ metaphysics, so popular in the more philosophical circles of the discipline, I find it more fruitful to put back the *ethnographic encounter* at the heart of the anthropological endeavour by studying *in situ* the conditions of a mutual (mis)understanding.

‘Epistemic triangulation’ or the cross-checking of ethnographic data

The third kind of reflexivity, certainly more familiar to field anthropologists, is to cross-check the ethnographic data gathered in order to determine what constitutes shared traits and what constitutes the unique individual and cultural traits of the experience – or better of ‘the experiences’. The ethnographic data can come from at least three different sources: full participation, observation, and interviews with the people²⁵. These sources can be seen as separate moments of the ethnographic endeavour or they can feed into each other. An interview can thus involve a significant amount of observation of, let’s say, the interviewee’s para- and non-verbal language. All observation is, perforce, self-observation (Clegg 2013) and, as Malinowski astutely noticed when he coined the term ‘participant observation’, it is also already a form of participation. Each of these sources of ethnographic data has its advantages and limitations. In the next section, I will come back to each of them and discuss them in the light of full participation and the three forms of ethnographic reflexivity I presented.

Full participation: an added value for ethnography?

According to Jacques Galinier, the ethnographer in the field potentially has access to two different sources of discursive data. First, the one he calls ‘external exegesis’ consists in ‘all the elicited utterances, logically structured by the informants with the help of the observer’ (1990: 203, our translation). In other words, all the data obtained via interviews (structured, semi-structured, informal, elicitation) with the people. The main benefit of this approach is that it gives access to an ‘*expert*’ discourse which can be rich and complex (mythological stories, interpretations of ritual action, cosmogonic theories, symbolism, etc.). If the interviews are conducted systematically with members from all the social categories of a population (women, children, religious experts, novices, etc.),²⁶ external exegesis gives us information on the *distribution* of knowledge within the population. However, external exegesis has two possible drawbacks. If used in short-term projects, the risk is that it produces knowledge that reflects the ethnographer’s concerns rather than those of the people he studies. One way to avoid this ethnocentric bias is to start conducting interviews late in the immersive process, when the ethnographer will have had a chance to reorganise his research based on the points of interest and the knowledge gathered from the interaction with his interlocutors. Concerning my own PhD thesis, it didn’t take long for me to realise that family history played an important part in understanding the relation

²⁵ Plus photographs, videos, drawings, books, maps, etc.

²⁶ Which is obviously only possible for small populations.

between *Xangô* members and their *orixás*, which led me to include this diachronic level in the interviews I conducted during the second part of my stay.

A further contingency of external exegesis is that it can be instrumentalised by the interviewees. As already noted, the ethnographer must have his own position in a social system marked by power struggles, whether open or concealed, individual ambitions and opportunities to be seized. And all of these could generate 'a highly codified staging of identities' (Wacquant 2002: 23), leading to a stereotyped and/or idealised discourse on the reality described. Therefore, external exegesis should be recognised for what it is, namely knowledge or talk *about* a cultural content, which, more often than not, does not touch on the processual dimension of a culture 'in the making' (Barth 1992). This limitation can however be overcome by relying more systematically on internal exegesis.

'Internal exegesis' refers to 'the heterogeneous assemblage of instances of speaking, screaming, singing, playing on words, crying that are not elicited from the outside, not a response to a request for a definition, but nonetheless constitute just as many instructions indicating the proper functioning of the ritual' (Galinier 1990: 203, our translation). Galinier's definition of this discursive category does indeed concern rituals but it can be extended to the culture in general. There are many advantages to this approach. First, internal exegesis tells the ethnographer what *kind* of information is being circulated, namely what constitutes a point of interest and is worth communicating by the members of a given culture. Second, internal exegesis reveals *how* the information is spontaneously communicated, namely the degree of diversity in terms of modes of expression (speech, body postures, singing, proxemics data, etc.), registers (ironic, facetious, formal, etc.) or of emotional intensity and modalities (sadness, irritation, joy, jubilation, etc.). Finally, in response to the second drawback of external exegesis, internal exegesis provides data on the *social strategies* for the circulation of information (withholding, dissimulating, lying, etc.), while highlighting the possible contradictions or nuances in the content or form of the exegetic discourse based on the context of utterance. Its main limitation is its contingent and non-systematic character, i.e. it can prove difficult to claim to have exhausted a given topic solely based on internal exegesis.

The main advantage of internal exegesis is that it deals with situated knowledge likely to provide a whole range of information pertaining not only to the content but also to the *forms* and *contexts* of knowledge transmission, which is a prerequisite for the understanding of rationales and stakes, i.e. the basis of all cultural learning.

While essential to ethnographic observation, language practices can be supplemented by other types of data depending on the research goal: forms and modalities of non-verbal interaction, gestures and body postures, emotional expression, spatial arrangement, handling of artefacts and substances, etc. The ethnographer's possibilities for action, and consequently his leeway to complete his observation successfully, will depend directly on the social position assigned to him. So, under certain circumstances, Arnaud the ethnologist was allowed to take notes but not to film,²⁷ to record what was said but not to take photographs, etc. It also happened that

²⁷The situation was further complicated by the presence of my brother, who is a filmmaker, and his camera. In order to film the process of my initiation, the oracle had to be consulted

Arnaud, the son of *Ode*, was allowed to take notes on condition that he should keep them to himself: ‘*You’re family! There’s no reason why you shouldn’t be taking notes... But you keep them to yourself, you don’t put them in your book.*’²⁸ This illustrates the relational game in which the ethnographer is inevitably caught, all the more so if he becomes integrated in groups of individuals for whom controlling the circulation of knowledge is a major social and identity issue.

And this is where I try to answer the question in the title of the section: Can we speak of an ethnographic added value in the case of full participation? The question is worth asking given the affective cost and its relational consequences to the ethnographer at the time of being ‘caught’, as well as the epistemological discomfort of being ‘caught’ a second time when he comes back to his ethnographic data. I believe that full participation does present two advantages or noteworthy functions.

On the one hand, full participation guides the gaze of the ethnographer: it teaches him where and how to look. ‘Education of attention’, as Tim Ingold coined it (2001), is critically important in a religious culture such as the *Xangô* where knowledge is (implicitly) ‘taken’ rather than (explicitly) ‘given’ (Halloy 2010), a learning process that Marcio Goldman nicely calls ‘*catar folhas*’, meaning to pick up information here and there, patiently, ‘with the hope that, at some point, a synthesis will be possible’²⁹ (2003: 455). This is the *heuristic function* of full participation. In my research on religious learning in the *Xangô de Recife* cult, my journey as initiated and possessed in training guided my attention towards the sensorial dimension of religious learning, and in particular to the constitutive role of liturgical activity in the development of a possession-specific emotional expertise (Halloy 2012, 2015).

On the other hand, full participation also fulfils an *epistemic function* by creating the conditions for the ethnographer’s developing of dispositions and abilities to do things, to experience or to *be* in the world differently. In short, this is a first step in the direction of exercising judgment and having a cultural expertise in synch with that of the people studied by the ethnographer.

for each stage of the initiation. The religious experts were astounded when *Ifá*, the *orixá* who speaks through the oracle, authorised the filming of the whole initiation. Unfortunately, most of the film data burnt down in a fire a few months later (*orixás* must have changed their mind...).

²⁸Comment by Júnior, my initiator, during an *obrigação de bale*, a sacrifice for the dead, a ceremony where men and women are spatially separated. There could be two possible reasons for this constraint on the ethnographer in that case. First, the need of the high-ranking religious experts (mainly men) to maintain full control of a type of liturgical knowledge and know-how in a socio-religious system governed mainly by women (Velho 1975, Boyer 1993). The second reason could be the liturgical system itself, namely the need to prevent ‘unprepared’ individuals (such as women but also children and non-initiated individuals) from coming into contact with so-called ‘dangerous’ knowledge, which could do them harm. On the relation between ‘secret’ and ‘danger’ see Fredrik Barth’s classical study (1975).

²⁹ According to Rita Laura Segato, non-verbal and emotional factors of communication with the *orixás* constitute the ‘*substância*’ of the *Xangô* cult (1989: 7). Notwithstanding this observation by the Argentinian anthropologist in the late 1980s, very few authors since then have paid a close attention to sensory, affective and non-verbal dimensions of religious experience in Afro-Brazilian religions (for some exceptions, see for example Wafer 1991, Segato 1995, Seligman 2014, Halloy 2015).

The aim of the ethnographer who uses full participation as a methodology is not 'to go native' or to 'play pretend' to have gone native, but rather to cultivate a form of openness to the affective intensities of the other culture – an *empathic ability* – as well as a form of self-observation and paying attention to the effect they have on him – an *introspective ability*. As Joshua Clegg fittingly emphasises:

The cultivation of reflexivity around our frames of reference is not simply a matter of paying attention to culture or context; *it requires training*, something that the earliest traditions of self-observation recognised as fundamental to meaningful self-reports. (2013: 281, my emphasis)

While, as I showed earlier, full participation demands the establishing of an ethnographic reflexivity of experience, it also relies on a series of 'technologies of the self' (Foucault 1994) or 'technologies of body awareness' (Grison 2012) that the ethnographer is encouraged to learn so that he can become what Stephen Gould calls 'a more sensitive introspective instrument' (2013:125).

The epistemic function of full participation is certainly more debatable, but also the one to offer the richest epistemological perspectives, particularly as it questions the conditions of scientific knowledge production. Even if it would be a mistake to reduce the background of our experimental colleagues to the scientific culture to which they belong, we must admit that the ethnographer's position is alien and sometimes disruptive insofar as the very situation of data production is a source of constant questioning, if not challenging, of the soundness of his approach as legitimate knowledge about the world. In sum, it is precisely because the ethnographer is in direct contact with cultural diversity and the plurality of frames of reference that reflexivity must be integral part of his method.

Final remarks

As Alessandra Fasulo rightly reminds us, the ethnographic method 'has always put the self at its centre as an instrument of knowing' (2013: 260). 'Self-ethnography' as 'autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest' (Reed-Danahai 1997: 2, cited in Fasulo (2013: 270)) is not something new in anthropology. Quite on the contrary, it is one of its trademarks. But the practice has nonetheless changed in the century that followed its first definition by Bronislaw Malinowski. In the tradition of the *Diary* of the founding-father of ethnography, of Michel Leiris' *L'Afrique fantôme* or Claude Lévi-Strauss' *Tristes Tropiques*, to quote just the most well-known examples, self-observation was generally limited to the ethnographer's diary because it revealed feelings and moods or intentions far from brilliant or even incompatible with the '*bonne distance*' required to produce 'objective' ethnographic knowledge. Self-ethnography looks very different today. It is not that ethnographers no longer suffer the unavoidable torments of ethnographic work, but self-ethnography has shifted from the first-person travel story to the introspective analysis of the ethnographer's lived experience as proven by a host of publications in the American postmodern tradition. However, the most spectacular transformation concerns less its phenomenological change of focus and more its methodological outcomes: first-person ethnography is an opportunity for the ethnographer to apply to his own experience the same descriptive and analytical

rigor that he applies to another's experience. This and the resulting reflexive attitude is what makes full participation worth experiencing.

Writing, or rather the tentative translation or rendering of an experience in writing, is an essential stage of the self-ethnographic process, well worth a separate discussion. I will limit myself here to giving just one piece of advice to the beginner ethnographers who might read these pages: do not censor yourselves when putting your experience into words! Rigor is not synonymous with cold indifference and even less with parsimony. Translating an experience often *requires* a blurring of genres (autobiographic narrative, psychological inquiry, poetry, essay, etc.) or at least an openness to words, expressions, images and metaphors as they pour fourth at the time of writing. What the ethnographer will do with them in the being 'caught' again phase is, as already shown, part and parcel of ethnographic reflexivity. The initial material, i.e. the first-person ethnography, is not analytical as such but descriptive. It has to be produced in this state of mind and only then it will add to the other sources of ethnographic data. But self-observation is not to be taken for granted. It requires a special epistemological attitude but also, as already shown, an ability for empathy and introspection that, in turn, requires cultivation and training.

As I argued earlier, the 'stealth mode' or '*bonne distance*' methodological strategies tend to distance the ethnographer from his own experience. Several choices are presented to the ethnographer willing not to get rid but instead to develop these abilities. I have mentioned earlier body awareness techniques (Grison 2012) – such as meditation, tai-chi, yoga, etc. - but doing sports and making art can also help to do the job. I would like to add to this list 'self-elicitation', a self-observation technique popular in various fields today, such as psychotherapy and 'perceptive pedagogy' (Berger et al. 2013, Berger 2014, Humpich 2015). As for elicitation interview techniques, the main goal of the technique is to access *pre-reflexive* stages of the lived experience through self-guided introspection. In other words, these techniques aim to shift – retrospectively – the focus to the *how* of the lived experience and away from its *what* (Vermersch 1994/2011, Petitmengin 2014, Petitmengin et al. 2013). Wouldn't it be possible to include these techniques in the ethnographer's methodological toolbox? Wouldn't it be beneficial to teach them in anthropology programs?

Another overlooked aspect of fieldwork is ethnographic 'intuition'. Intuition, to put it simply, might be described as a recognition process anchored in past experiences. Herbert Simon's defines it in these terms:

The situation has provided a cue; this cue has given the expert access to information stored in memory, and the information provides the answer. Intuition is nothing more and nothing less than recognition' (Simon 1992: 155).

It strikes me indeed that ethnographic intuition has received so little methodological attention when everybody knows that upon arriving in the midst of an often culturally foreign people, whose language and basic social rules he does not know, the ethnographer has no choice but to trust his intuition to make sense of the life being woven around him. He will undoubtedly face a series of misunderstandings, resulting in fluctuating meanings or emotional uncertainty, both of them likely to prompt empathy and introspection. Paraphrasing neuropsychologist Antonio Damasio (1999), this could be described as an instance of a '*social* feeling of what happens'. I believe that by thoroughly and systematically documenting the encounters that marked the

anthropologist's ethnographic journey, with its misunderstandings, talking at cross-purposes, blunders and faux pas, would provide us with rich information on what shaped the 'gaze' he uses to look at the people, but also on the development of a mostly intuitive ability to discern what occurs on each of the social, interpersonal and individual levels. As Datson and Galison remind us, 'beside the exemplary personas of the sage and the indefatigable worker, the *intuitive expert* depends on 'unconscious judgment to organise experience into patterns in the very act of perception'. (2012: 44) This *sensitive discernment* and understanding are directly involved in the ethnographer's acquiring a given 'cultural expertise' (Halloy 2015), based on dispositional inflexions and abilities specific to the culture he studies.

In this article I argue in favour of an epistemological shift from a hermeneutics of otherness perspective to a pragmatics of ethnographic encounters as the basis of anthropological knowledge and its underlying 'objectivity'. This attitude – as I defined it – cannot do without a discussion of the researcher's *ethos* – what are his expectations both professional and personal? What are his goals and the means used to meet them? Understanding human behaviour in both the social and cognitive sciences needs to rely on both third-person methods – the description of behavioural, neural, etc. *manifestations* – and first-person methods – the accompanying *subjective lived experiences*. According to this perspective, 'objectivity' cannot be the outcome of either the 'stealth mode' or of the (fake) distance created between the ethnographer and his own emotions and/or the people and practices in his field research. Moreover, they are the very source of the 'objectivity' delusion and by that they harm the very epistemological foundations of anthropology. The alternative I suggest, following the advice of Unni Wikan, is to cultivate 'a higher degree of resonance' (1992: 475) with the culture studied through full participation³⁰. The legitimacy and interest of first-person knowledge generated by this higher degree of resonance would draw on a three-fold ethnographic reflexivity likely to shed new light on what, after all, is the object of any anthropological inquiry, namely to research and convey to a large audience what makes the sharing of experiences possible.

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³⁰ The French word 'disponibilité', as coined by surrealist André Breton (1976), might be a good substitute to the English word 'resonance'. Applied to ethnography, it describes a mental attitude characterised by a willingness of being available to others and the sensory and affective solicitations of the environment, but also by an openness of the ethnographer to 'go beyond his or her presumptions'. (Bowie 2013: 710-711).

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