

## The Culture in-between: Anthropologist and Missionary as Partners

Walter van Beek

In his challenging identification of missionary and anthropologist, Sjaak van der Geest (1987) touches upon several fundamental issues in the anthropological discipline. For some reason the similarities (and differences) of both types of fieldworkers are at the core of our anthropological definition of the self. Commenting on the similarities, I shall try to unravel some factors behind them, as there seems to be a fundamental contradiction between the two disciplines: opposite goals with similar outputs. One major difference, as Van der Geest sees it, has to be dealt with first, i.e. how 'seriously' we take religion, or in my terms, the question of *emics*. I try to show that this quest for emics is theoretically a dead end, as it is both epistemologically impossible and unproductive through the demand for comparison. This leads us to the question what are the limits of our empathy and sympathy of belief.

Returning, then, to our main theme, the roots of similarities and differences between anthropologist and missionary, it will be shown that the field situation of both has the following things in common: empathy, sympathy of belief, a gentle comparison and a definite search for emics. This is what I call the 'in-between' or 'intermediate' culture, shared by anthropologist and missionary alike.

### The problem of emics

Do anthropologists take religion seriously? One complaint of Van der Geest (1987) is that anthropologists refuse to take informants statements on religion at their own value, routinely translating them into the scientific jargon (the *Metaphor*). Thus, one essential

element, the 'religious', is lost. This common anthropological practice, he argues, stems from a deep negation of any religious or metaphysical matter in anthropology, rendering an anthropologist a 'blind man speaking about colours'. The missionary, on the other hand, has the one major advantage of a true empathy with his informant.

This thesis needs revision, at least a *retouch*. Is 'true empathy' that productive? As an example we shall look into a discipline that explicitly puts this 'co-believers empathy' at the heart of its methodology, the phenomenology of religion. As a major hallmark of its heuristics, this tradition within the history of religion considers each religion as a phenomenon *sui generis* (of its own kind), abhorring any reduction of religious phenomena into 'lower order factors'. Since the epoch-making work of Rudolf Otto *Das Heilige* (1917), the phenomenology of religion has been searching for a productive balance between an empiricist approach and a method which preserved the true value of religion. In this vein Van der Leeuw, Eliade and Widengren wrote their seminal works, to mention a few culture-heroes. This tradition always has retained a strong link with theology (Sharpe 1975: 234 ff.), even warranting an accusation of being a 'handmaiden of theology' (ibid: 264).

Be it or not, for our argument one thing is clear: a well-developed discipline explicitly aims at a sympathetic understanding of any religion against the background of its own context and history, while retaining the full value of the religious phenomena as well as respect for the believing other<sup>1</sup>.

So much for its program, now for its results. What has been the particular productivity of this phenomenological method of *epochè*, the study of religious matters with full suspension of value judgement? In what measure has it been possible to study religious matters without translating them into other values? Two traditions can be discerned, which I have dubbed the 'quest for essence' and the 'quest for form' (Van Baal & Van Beek 1985: 202, 211).

Following Otto, theoreticians of religion have searched for those elements and aspects of religion deemed essential for a generic understanding. Otto's notion of the numinous, Schleiermacher's *Gefühl des Schlechthinigen Abhängigkeit*, the concept of 'hierophany' (Eliade 1961: 34) and in a way Van Baal's characterization of a religious attitude as a 'groundseeking groundlessness' (Van Baal 1972: 61) may serve as examples. These authors deepened our understanding of the generic notion of religion; still,

in this discussion within phenomenology personal and theological arguments had a substantial role.

From this tradition a severe criticism has been voiced towards the general methodological stance of social-scientific study of religion: methodological atheism. Rooted in the work of Zijderveldt (Towler 1974: 184), this concept has been popularized by Peter Berger in his sociology of religion. As the truth or falsehood of religion cannot empirically be verified or falsified, Berger argues, the correct scientific method, which he prescribes, is to explain the religious phenomenon as much as possible through observable factors, like social organization, economics, political process; in short using non-religious variables. This, of course, is the standard anthropological approach of explanation or translation. Witchcraft is 'explained' by pointing at tensions within society. Nuer Ewins are not truly birds (Evans-Pritchard 1965: 315) but this expression gives shape to the special relation of 'normal' Nuer to twins. Against this methodological atheism, Eliade argues that the research of religion puts itself on a 'naturalistic' point of view, studying any religion as an entomologist studies a weird insect: from a great distance through an intricate instrument<sup>2</sup>. Two arguments can be raised against this stance.

Firstly, Eliade argues, that the distance between observer and observed is false. Only a historical accident (place and date of birth) separates scientist and 'object' of study. Secondly, through this artificial distance the researcher denies himself a unique opportunity: as a fellow human the scientist can feel himself in the others *mocassins*, gleaning more insight into his fellow believer. What would an entomologist give to be able to 'empathize' with his insect!

Thus far I follow Van der Geest (1987) in his critique on the standard anthropological strategy of description and explanation. However, a problem arises when we look at the more specific results of this sympathetic program, in the second line, the quest for form. Granted its own *genus*, religion appears to the eye of the observer in a bewildering variety of forms, a wealth of religious expressions that challenges the student. The reaction of the phenomenology of religions is to label and to classify the phenomena: the religious experience and expression of one's fellow man are continually being processed: labeled with pre-existing descriptive concepts, classified in predetermined categories. Using concepts and distinctions from their own religion (the sacred), from classical religions (numen) or philosophical presuppositions (transcendence),

only in a small minority of cases scholars do apply the notions of the people studied (taboo, mana, dema); in that later case, anthropologists serve as their major source. In and through the process of labeling and categorization, the religious phenomena are changed. Even if not reduced to sociology or psychology, they are measured on another Procrustean bed, that of comparative analysis. Thus, the religious experience and expression is reduced to what phenomenology considers to be a phenomenon (Van Baal & Van Beek 1985: 206). In its own ranks, this tendency of phenomenology has evoked the criticism of making only a religious *Inventor eines antiquierter Museums*<sup>3</sup>.

So praxis differs from theory. Despite a heartfelt wish to take religious information seriously, in practice the hand of the analyst is felt, and heavily. Why this apparent inability to arrive at a systematic empathy of informant's expressions? I feel the crux is the term 'systematic'. Phenomenology's goal (and Van der Geest's) is nothing else but the quest for a truly 'emic' approach: a description and sympathetic analysis in terms of that particular system and relevant for the participants in that culture or religion, in short 'to get inside the informant's head' (Goodenough 1965: 64)<sup>4</sup>. This call for 'true emics' is quite old and will be repeated again in the future. It has its roots in linguistics, in fact in a strictly descriptive Bloomfieldian approach. The claim to take religion serious has these two sides: the *sui generis* definition of religion on the one hand and the descriptive rigour of an emic approach on the other hand. So let us take a quick glance at descriptive emics.

In anthropology this insistence on *emics* has nowhere been stronger than in ethnoscience. This approach has all the characteristics of a short-lived paradigm: a sudden emergence around a few studies, a network of adepts and disciples as well as a quick demise of the paradigm through a fast erosion of its major claims (Murray 1982: 168). It is not the place here to delve deeply into the reasons for this 'meteoric disappearance', though some factors have to become clear. Firstly, the enormous wealth of detailed information gathered in this emic fashion could in no way be integrated into a comprehensive description that offered more "than could be said on the basis of old-fashioned participant observation" (Kay, cited in Murray 1982: 169). The second problem was comparison. In some lexical fields this seems to have succeeded (Berlin & Kay 1969), but even this much-debated example is an exception. Harris' criticism as to the impossibility of comparison (Harris 1988: 315 ff.) has never been answered adequately. After all,

these types of emic analysis and description may, have been 'Hocus-Pocus', but surely not 'God's Truth' (Burling 1964: 20). Even worse, the strict separation of emics from *etics* rendered ethnographic research 'anemic and emetic' (Berreman 1966: 346), which through the demise of Bloomfieldian linguistics accounted for 'paradigms lost' (Keesing 1972). Anyway, anthropology's bid for a systematic emic approach has withered away: "by the late 1960s (...) classical ethnoscience was no more" (Murray 1982: 172). A truly emic approach showed itself to be impossible and unproductive.

The failure of ethnoscience and the impotence of phenomenology point at a serious flaw with 'true emics'. What makes these approaches so sterile? First, the problems of epistemology seem to be quite unsurmountable, as the inductive heuristics of the approaches stem from a naive empiricism no longer adhered to. More important is the aspect of comparison, explicitly aimed at in both approaches as their ultimate goal. The necessity for comparison does not relate well to an insistence on emics. Even in descriptions the use of indigenous terms has to be restricted in order to maintain the readability of the description. Comparison, leads to a higher level of abstraction and a greater distance from the phenomena: through the analysis of differences and similarities and the necessity for a meta-language to express conclusions. Inevitably, this process implies selection, rooted either in a more or less explicit theory or in personal interests and preferences. So in addition to the informant three other parties are involved: the researcher, the scientific community and other religions and cultures with which a comparison is made. Both the theoretical impossibility of 'true emics' and the comparative nature of anthropology (or the study of religion) render explanation or metaphorization of religious statement inevitable. These two reasons would suffice, if not a third, existential reason presented itself: the inherent problem of 'believing anything'.

### The ends of empathy

As social scientists we share every human trait of the fellow men we study, also the capacity of belief. Though for most anthropologists their upbringing and training has eroded this faculty, it still is an aspect of our existence. Van der Geest (1987) is right in stating that this is a research tool as well: an atheistic anthropologist has a handicap in religious research.

However, this is one side of the coin. True, a researcher who does not take religion seriously, bars him- or herself from aspects of understanding the believing other. Yet, taking religion seriously is not at all the same as taking each and every religious statement seriously. One can try to feel empathy with a Kwakiutl who says he is a salmon, trying to probe what this means to him or her, without ever truly believing the informant is identical to a salmon. After all, Sandor did not throw his informant back into the sea either!

Apparently, our empathy ends somewhere; there is a limit to what one can imagine to believe or 'co-believe'. As an example, a famous citation from Foucault (1965) may serve. It is a classification of the animal kingdom in the old imperial China:

The animals are subdivided into  
 belonging to the emperor  
 balmed  
 tame  
 piglets  
 sirens  
 animals from fables  
 running dogs  
 mentioned in this classification  
 behaving like mad  
 innumerable  
 drawn with a fine camel's hair  
 etcetera  
 who come to break the jar  
 who from afar look like flies

Such a classification haunts us, Foucault comments, not because it is different and definitely non-occidental, but because we cannot imagine ourselves to devise such a 'system'. This *impossibilité de penser cela* is just what I am aiming at. There seems to be a limit to our production of empathy and belief, at least in this kind of cognitive issues. In my own fieldwork, like many colleagues, I have repeatedly encountered such situations. Some elements of Kapsiki belief were easy for me to 'share' with my informants; the cosmology, for instance, (Van Beek 1978: 367ff.), I could imagine to believe or to be able to believe. In other situations this was quite the reverse, like the following, classical therapeutic situation.

A blacksmith's woman, specialist in child medicine, treated a boy that probably suffered from a parasitic disease: swollen abdomen, thin legs and arms. Her diagnosis was kwankwèrèkwè, a small frog that is presumed to enter the body through the foot soles, and to proliferate in the belly. For treatment the boy knelt before the smith's woman. With a handful of leaves she took some muddy water from a jar at her feet and rubbed the boy's belly. After some rubbing suddenly she put out her hand and showed a small frog, presumably coming from the child's belly. She threw it in the jar, stroked at it with a stone and resumed the treatment. That session she retrieved twenty kwankwèrèkwè from the boy.

In this particular case I had spoken with the woman beforehand about the treatment. During that first encounter she assumed that I did not believe her, or maybe she got some inkling of my unbelief, however good I tried to disguise it. After the session with the boy, she was sure that I - at last - believed what she had told me would happen. Evidently, I did not correct her, but just as evidently I did not believe her. For me it was and is impossible to believe that those frogs spring from that belly, a predicament shared, of course, by many anthropologists, one that has evoked a number of commentaries (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 161). Relevant for me in this are two considerations. I can not follow the 'official' Kapsiki diagnosis and doctrine of treatment, and even more, nor do I see how another anthropologist may adhere to the native interpretation. If so, I do not see any advantage in doing so for the understanding of that particular culture. As a disbeliever in this particular issue, I had to account for a difference in knowledge and attitude between patient and spectators on the one hand and the smith's woman on the other. This classic shamanistic problem has been amply discussed in anthropology, but my point here is that the necessity to think the matter through beyond the overt informants' statements, adds to the understanding of values and processes within that culture. In my case, the smith's position gained another dimension, which appeared to be relevant in other aspects of Kapsiki culture too.

So there is no escape from interpretation and explanation, no way of avoiding the *Metaphor*. Sandor too used an interpretation, one that - though uncommon - might be closer to Kwakiutl perception (but maybe not for all Kwakiutl). The opposite question then is: What are the limits of empathy for an anthropologist? Each of us

may have his own limits, and for an anthropologist for whom religion is not superstition of others those borders may be drawn differently than for his atheistic colleagues. Yet, if taken a religious position, the anthropologist may provide a better empathy with the informants as a co-believer, it also may be a liability in restricting empathy towards specific religious statements. A paradox looms here: the anthropologist who takes religions seriously may have a differential empathy: some elements of the informant's religion are cognitively and emotionally more accessible for him, than in the case of an atheistic researcher, as is the general issue of religion, but others are not. A missionary is faced with a similar problem. As a believing Christian he has a focussed but more restricted empathy with specific aspects of the religion in question. He takes religion seriously but cannot agree with its specific content. The believing fellow-man is his partner, but his beliefs are not.

So given this inevitability of the *metaphor* and the difference between religion and religious content, the question rises whether the difference between missionary and anthropologist is in fact as large as Van der Geest (1987) asserts. Both distance themselves from the factual content of the informants' beliefs, both translate them into a language they consider to be a meta-language, an encompassing view that can contain the informant's vision but definitely is not his. For both some modesty is called for. For a missionary it may spring from the realization that the certainties of Christianity are subject to erosion (a consideration not relevant for fundamentalist missions). The anthropologist is aware of the limitations of his discipline, too. For instance, the level of explanation of cultural phenomena is not so high to warrant an overly self-confident stance. In our discipline explanations seldom surpass the level of plausibility, showing how the observed phenomena fit into the processes and structures of culture, time and place. Especially in religious phenomena this holds true. No anthropologist can seriously maintain that religious movements have been adequately explained in all their variety by the standard anthropological theories.

Consequently, a more moderate and modest methodological stance would suit anthropology better. Instead of methodological atheism, I have proposed methodological agnosticism (Van Beek 1982: 8) as a more honest point of departure. After all, in empirical research no anthropologist can make any statement about 'the other side of the world'. From an empirical point of view no statement at all can be made, positive nor negative. Of course, even when starting from agnosticism, one should look for non-religious

factors and processes interacting with the religious phenomena, and - inevitably - the *Metaphor* remains paramount. Still, in such a strategy one at least silently acknowledges that not all religious phenomena can be totally explained or translated. A starting point of 'not-knowing' may render us less pretentious.

The limits of empathy for both anthropologist and missionary and the modesty that would befit both, leads us to the question of commonalities between both. For this we have to return to the quest for emics. Starting with a critique of 'systematic empathy' focusing on the cases of phenomenology of religion and ethnoscience, I have sketched the ends of empathy. In this, the anthropologist and the missionary, though operating from different angles, were shown to share some basic similarities, among which the search for understanding the other is paramount. If this is so, one major difference Van der Geest (1987) perceives between anthropologist and missionary evaporates, which renders their similarity even stronger. So now we have to explore the extent as well as the content of these similarities.

In the following section, I try to outline a common existential basis for the similarities between the anthropologist and the missionary. Both try to understand the other culture or believer, both are limited in this quest for several reasons, and both have to rely on interpretation, translation and explanation, on the *Metaphor*. In my view, these commonalities spring from a dominant way of life which they both share, the field situation. I think that this shared field situation accounts for most of the similarities Van der Geest (1987) pointed at. In their quest for emic understanding both the anthropologist and the missionary have to select items from the culture, assign priorities, translate cultural form and content into new forms meaningful for a larger audience. They are able to do so as they both are in-between two cultures, the one studied and the one of their origin. Being in-between, and being in the field, they both create an intermediate culture, a culture of 'understanding', of 'emics', of 'translation'. It is in this shared in-between culture where most similarities between missionary and anthropologist are rooted.

### The anthropologist and the missionary as partners in one intermediate culture

Anthropologists and missionaries<sup>5</sup> share an existential situation which I shall call the *field situation*, which enables them both to serve as an independent translator of cultures.

At the mission post<sup>6</sup> as well as in anthropological fieldwork one is no longer fully part of one's culture of origin. However, one is neither a fully-fledged member of the host culture. This syndrome of the 'professional stranger' is well known in anthropology, especially in the field. The anthropologist in the field is a stranger to both cultures, host and origin. For the missionary the same holds; he remains a stranger and grows ever more estranged from his root culture through his long field period, even more than the anthropologist. One major aspect of this 'professional stranger' - situation is the creation of a *piéd à terre*, one's own domain: the 'post'.

The missionary is part of a mission culture, either as a family at a Protestant mission, or in the Catholic case with colleagues. He lives there with a limited and self-selected number of people from Western culture, sharing a common program, living in a surrounding which is neither western nor part of local culture, African, Melanesian or whatever. The language usually is a European one, clothing is Western or professional (= Western), living quarters share the best of local culture with Western commodities.

The anthropologist usually creates for himself a comparable environment. He or she lives as 'authentically' as is feasible, sometimes sharing the compound of a family, but often in one's own hut or house. Despite the ideology of participation ('living just like...') the anthropologist's situation does differ significantly from that of his informants. Finances, health, food and transport are guaranteed (including the return ticket). He has the material means to render his fieldstay productive, which means reasonably comfortable. Both in those instances where the researcher has his own household and where he lives in with another family the anthropologist creates his own domain, private and - if possible - inviolate, his own cultural territory. (This may, incidentally, be easier for a male anthropologist than for a female colleague). This

holds ever stronger in cases of team-research, where non-anthropologists participate.

The 'post' is, however, not a Western island in a sea of local culture, as the very goal of the post is to be continually open to its host culture. But there is an interface between the post and the culture. The people on the post interact intensively with a few selected members of the local culture (personnel) and less intensively with the other people, often on a more focussed basis, consonant with the purpose of the work. When venturing out into the host community, the selected 'autochtones' serve as guides and go-betweens. Their networks often serve as channels into this other culture. Knowledge of the local language is essential for the functioning of the intermediary culture. An interpreter is allowed only in the first phase of the fieldstay. Still, even with a reasonable mastery of the language, selected locals remain important as a link with the outside.

Mission-posts start working with a self-selected minority which remains important in their later phases. These early converts, personnel and other followers, can become key figures in full grown missions. Striking examples can be found in African novels, e.g. Mongo Béti's *Petit Christ*. Anthropologists collaborate intensively with a few assistants, however many informants they may list in their monograph. As any anthropologist is his own principal instrument of research, the number of significant relations with the people studied has to remain restricted. Research assistants or interpreters belong to the most important category of collaborators, often unjustly kept in the shadow of the researcher's report, mentioned only in the preface of the dissertation. They may harbour their own views on the fieldwork done; Salinas' *On the clan of anthropologists* (Russell 1975: 71-7) is a nice example. My own research among the Kapsiki could not have succeeded without my assistant, Luc Sunu. He was and still is convinced that it was more his research than mine. Maybe he is right.

Compared to the home culture, life at the post is sober, both in general comfort, food and clothing. Distraction maybe found in the local community, but this is never wholly separated from work.

Neither are people from back home helpful in this. They have to be entertained and shown around or are a bother in another way. Real leisure time is spent with people sharing the same intermediate culture, with the partners working in the same field.

Mission networks are remarkably closed and homogeneous, often even restricted to one denomination. Representatives from different missions in the same area meet seldom, I was astonished to see in Cameroon and Mali. In various cases I served as a link between the mission. This was especially the case in Cameroon, where I had to play the mediator's role between Protestant and Catholic missionaries in establishing a standard orthography for the Kapsiki language. In any mission the difference between a visitor from inside the mission network and from one outside is striking. The mission post in Kapsiki country had a rest house where missionaries on leave or officials stayed. Interaction of local missionaries with their colleagues was much easier, more informal and more directed at life at the mission than with other visitors. The experience was repeated in Mali, for both Protestant and Catholic mission posts.

Also anthropologists take time off, both the possibility to do so and its necessity are part of the intermediate culture. Contact with colleagues may be difficult to establish, though in North Cameroon I had contact with many anthropologists. Routinely, however, an anthropologist searches for the nearest mission station; or, the quarters of a development worker (who also belongs to the in-between culture) may serve.

A proclaimed flexibility in food habits and interaction patterns is part and parcel of the intermediate culture. Eating and - especially - drinking in the larger community is part of the normal routine, important for work. The continuous accessibility for members of the host culture is essential for the intermediate one, in fact is viewed as an important value. Ideologically, this openness towards the host culture forms the distinguishing characteristic between culture of origin and the culture in-between. Members of the latter are different from the former, just because they continually relate to and are accessible for participants and ideas from the host culture.

Some anthropologists may raise doubts whether this holds true for the mission. Though for some fundamentalist missions it may not hold, in my experience the missionary without an open appreciation for his hosts, is an anthropological stereotype. Both in Mali and in Cameroon missionizing met with such limited success to necessitate an abiding interest in local culture. In mainstream missions the old hierarchy between incoming high status Europeans and low status locals has long since eroded.

For the anthropologist this view of himself is customary: he is different from other Europeans or Americans by having renounced the syndrome of ethnocentricity. This very openness towards the other culture, however, is possible only through the proper intercultural background the anthropologist creates for himself. Anyway, his accessibility for and access to the host culture form his principal research method. What is viewed as a value, in fact is a field tool.

People change by being part of the intermediary culture. One distinguishing trait of both the anthropologist and the missionary is the problem of readaptation: when coming back from the field stay, either at the end of the research period or on furlough, resettling in the culture of origin proves difficult. Anthropologists are usually proud of this 'secondary culture shock' (Barley 1983), which shows them to be true initiates. These readaptation problems spring from the gap between host and Western culture. The partners in the intermediate culture have a vested interest in stressing the differences between these two cultures. After all, they are the translators, who render the values of the one culture accessible to the other. The values themselves, too, of each particular culture, should not be played down either, as the very value of both human culture and differences between cultures form the *raison d'être* for the existence of the intermediate culture. The value of culture is not subject to discussion.

For the missionary this holds too. Though this translation proceeds in an opposite direction from the anthropologist's one, it still is a translation. In no way can a translated message be parachuted into a local community. The hard labours of bible translators, discussions about

use of 'local ritual' and musical instruments, as well as the implementation of local leadership serve as indications.

The anthropologist considers translation to be at the heart of his profession. Evans Pritchard explicitly states so in the introduction to his *Nuer Religion*<sup>7</sup>. Often, the anthropologist labours under the illusion that the language he translates into, is a meta-language. That, of course, is only so for a small part; for most purposes it is SAE (Standard Average European).

Commitment to both cultures, host and origin, is essential for the intermediate one, being in fact a bridge between the two. The culture in-between is not an overlap between host and own, but a gate. The partners in the intermediate culture select which elements from one culture will be translated into the other. Value judgements of both other cultures as well as assessments of relative weight are done by the gatekeepers, the in-between partners. This selection of cultural elements is a fundamental difference between the partners in the intermediary one and participants in any one culture: the former are the only ones able to form a balanced opinion about the intrinsic values of both cultures.

Against the people back-home this shows as a relativism, and against the local culture as a severe criticism of the home culture. Though tensions between homefront and mission are not evident, they do exist nevertheless. Especially for fundamentalist missions (well represented in Africa) the image of the mission field is strikingly different from that held by the missionaries. In the case of the mainstream missions a longer missionary tradition and a less direct link with the background church have led to more an autonomous mission field. Still, values and norms developed in the field diverge from the church back home. As an example the relative tolerance of polygyny in the catholic mission in Mali may serve; there the missionaries follow a strategy of not wanting to know, in order not to have to condemn.

For an anthropologist *back-home* is more diverse. The academic community serving as a background does not normally belong to the intermediate culture. Touring the field, colleagues (and supervisors of theses) can be a pain in the neck. Family and friends rarely visit the more

remote field areas and are of little influence. Other visitors may be chance ones, like tourists; in both of my research areas they represented the home culture most emphatically, sometimes amusing, sometimes exasperating, usually bothering and always time consuming. This diversity of background makes critique of the home culture easy for the anthropologist, while at the same time rendering it relatively harmless and ineffective.

The position as gatekeepers, which the partners in the intermediate culture share, is bolstered by the respect they enjoy from both cultures in question. For the local hosts they represent the dominant Western culture, even deemed superior by many. In short, the partners are viewed as people who were kind enough to step down. The people 'back-home' view the soberness and accessibility of the in-betweens as a (relative) sacrifice the partners bring in order to stay in the host culture, and as such as a proof of commitment to a noble cause or of a laudable academic dedication. The existential privileges of living in that intermediate culture are evident only to its participants (and let us leave it that way).

A mild culture relativism is, as we said, essential for the intermediate culture, as the partners live under a constant pression for self-justification. Their presence in the field may be appreciated by both cultures, but is self-evident to none. Besides, the grounds for appreciation by the other cultures, differ sharply from the reasons why anthropologists and missionary stay in the field.

The basis for justification of the mission is changing, at least in Africa. The people back home still adhere to the stereotyped vision that the diffusion and permanence of Christianity is at stake in the presence of the missionary. Developments in African Christianity have long since caught up with this view. In West-African missions, for instance, the tasks and roles of the expatriates are being redefined, a process much longer under way in other parts of Africa. Indigenization of African churches implies a marginalization of missionary. On the one hand they are being retrained - or redefined - as development workers, a role they fulfill with varying success and fluctuating motivation. On the other hand they are *dirigés à l'ethnographie*, as a missionary recently told me in North Cameroon. Especially for the more fundamentalist mis-

sions this change is hard to stomach. According to one missionary of the Lutheran Brethren Mission in Cameroon, his new role as a development worker implied that he had to make people rich, thereby turning them away from the church. One missionary's son had, as a consequence, left the missionary service and started an automobile workshop in Cameroon in order to be more influential in the local church.

An anthropologist's self-justification is usually less complex, as his stay is both marginal and short. For the local people, the anthropologist's fieldstay is usually less problematic than for the researcher himself; they almost routinely use the anthropologist as a pawn in local power arenas. My own justification in Cameroon was to write a local history, an explanation needed as the *chef de canton* had some suspicions how the other Kapsiki would use my presence. In Dogon country, by contrast, I felt no need to explain my stay in the field. Whereas other villages had long since been 'honoured' with anthropologists, time was more than ripe that this particular village had its share. Most of the need for justification springs from the anthropologist himself. Various reasons, like the imbalance between giving to and receiving from the host culture and the fundamental debt the anthropologist feels towards his host culture, account for that; for the host culture it easily results in becoming a partisan for, of course still from the relative comforts of the intermediate culture. A positive evaluation of concepts like 'cultural diversity', 'tradition', 'equality' and 'group identity' form a part of this attitude.

These latter values, belonging to a small-scale society giving well-being to a marginal group, are highly relevant in the ideology of the intermediate culture. As a systematic ideology cultural relativism is in itself void, and should be filled in with inherent values of specific interpersonal relations. The missionary usually shares these values and aims at preserving them in the implementation of the mission program. In both instances, for the anthropologist as well as the missionary, these values fit in a social environment small enough to control through a personal network: they define a manageable group and a flock that can be herded. Of

course, these values restrict cultural relativism. The missionary has to translate an external message into the local culture and yet preserve the values he cherishes in it, and, integrate those elements he deems of worth. The anthropologist on the one hand has to deny the perceived superiority of his home culture, while on the other hand affirming or even restoring the value of the local culture. The same cultural relativism that makes him criticize his culture of origin - at least its pretensions and the way the local culture perceives it - challenges him into an over-valuation of the other culture.

A missionary in such a case may turn partisan, though in my experience it happens less often than van der Geest (1987) seems to suggest. Most missionaries I have encountered have a great respect for individual members of the host culture, but have little inclination to play the partisan. Not all political situations give rise to that necessity. Yet, missionaries usually define relationships more on a one to one basis.

The anthropologist probably tends more to extend and abstract his appreciation of persons towards a society and a culture. After all, very few field anthropologists actually dislike 'their' people; most of us combine a close, intimate relation with individual people with a positive valuation of their culture. I remember my own irritations over the self-denigrating way the Kapsiki of Cameroon spoke about their own culture<sup>8</sup>. If my presence and research would heighten their self-esteem and ethnic well-being, I would feel rewarded. When presently this indeed happens (van Beek 1988), I experience it as some justification of my work, anyway as a positive change. The only deception, evidently, is the minute part I really played in it.

Yet, cultural relativism remains an empty message, with an inherent contradiction: any systematic relativism destroys both one's own theoretical position and the appreciation of the culture studied. The only way out is a restricted relativism, through the process of selection of cultural elements that is central to the intermediate culture. It is the relative autonomy of that culture in-between that enables anthropologist and missionary to play the gate-keeper's role, albeit to a limited extent. Relativism is always

basically a moral judgement. The contradictions between cultural selection and denial of judgement can only be met in appropriating the rules of evaluation. This precisely is the luxury of the field culture, and sets off anthropologist and missionary alike as partners in one, intermediate, culture.

### Notes

- 1 That a strict reliance on written sources, bears another, inevitable bias is a typical anthropological critique, which is not relevant for our discussion here.
- 2 The need for 'explanation' is of course a hidden way to face the question of truth: the Kwakiutl stating himself to be a salmon, cannot be believed at face value. According to Fabian, this problem of dealing with veracity shows the remnants of "a positivist philosophy of science which has run its course" (Fabian 1979, 1981). Still, it is difficult to see how, under whatever epistemology, this kind of question can wholly be abolished.
- 3 Van der Leeuw too, recognizes this problem: "I realized that this phenomenology of religion could not only consist of an inventory and classification of phenomena..." (cited in Sharpe 1975: 231). His solution is one of self-analysis and introspection by the researcher, a venue that most anthropologists would not opt for.
- 4 Another view on *emic* is more formal, defining it through diacritical rules that are relevant only within the system. Beyond linguistics, though, the difference is less marked.
5. For convenience I use both terms masculine; evidently, both the female and the male representatives of the species are meant, especially for the 'anthropologist'. Throughout, I refer to Western anthropologists and missionaries. Their non-western colleagues, despite their different culture of origin, have to be counted too as partners in the intermediate culture, through their education, position and international contact. Still, most of them tend to lessen the gap between the host and own culture, by working in their own culture of origin.
- 6 With 'missionary' both the Catholic and Protestant variety is meant, as with the term 'mission'.
7. The call for 'truly emic' description originated in the realization that *traduttore* equals *traditore*. Hence emic approaches avoid translation labeling as long as possible, which often renders publications of ethnoscience very hard to read.
8. Research on the Kapsiki of Cameroon has been done in 1971, 1972-3, 1979, 1988 and made possible by grants of WOTRO (Foundation for the advancement of tropical research) and the University of Utrecht. Research in Mali on the Dogon has been going on since 1978, financed by the same sources.

### References

- Berremán, G.D.  
1966 Anemic and Emetic Analyses in Social Anthropology. *American Anthropologist*, 68: pp. 346-54.
- Burling, R.  
1964 Cognition and Componential Analysis: Gods Truth or Hocus Pocus. *American Anthropologist*, 66: pp. 20-8.
- Eliade, M.  
1961 *Images and Symbols*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.  
1969 *The quest: History and Meaning in Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E.  
1956 *Nuer Religion*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Fabian, J.  
1979 The Anthropology of Religious Movements: from Explanation to Interpretation. *Social Research*, 46(1): pp. 4-35.  
1981 Six Theses Regarding the Anthropology of African Religious Movements. *Religion*, 11: pp. 109-26.
- Goodenough, W.H.  
1965 *Description and Comparison*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Foucault, M.  
1965 *Les mots et les choses*. Paris: Plon.
- Harris, M.  
1968 *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*. New York: Crowell.
- Keessing, R.M.  
1972 Paradigms Lost Componential Analysis after the Bloomfieldian Linguistics. *Ethnology*: pp 134-61.
- Lévi-Strauss, Cl.  
1963 Le sorcier et sa magie. *Anthropologie structurale*: pp. 161-83.
- Murray, S.O.  
1982 The Dissolution of 'Classical Ethnoscience'. *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 18: pp. 163-75.
- Otto, R.  
1917 *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*. Breslau: Trwendt & Grabier.

120 *The Ambiguity of Rapprochement*

Russell, H.B.

1975 *The Human Way. Readings in Anthropology*. New York: MacMillan.

Sharpe, E.J.

1975 *Comparative Religion: a History*. Londen: Duckworth.

Towler, R.

1974 *Homo Religiosus. Sociological Problems in the Study of Religion*. Londen: Constable.

Van Baal, J.

1967 *Mensen in verandering. Ontstaan en groei van een nieuwe cultuur in ontwikkelingslanden*. Amsterdam.

1972 *De boodschap der drie illusies*. Assen: van Gorcum.

Van Baal, J. & W.E.A. van Beek

1985 *Symbols for Communication. An Introduction to the Anthropological Study of Religion*. Assen: van Gorcum.

Van Beek, W.E.A.

1982 *Spiegel van de mens. Religie en antropologie*. Assen: van Gorcum.

1988 *The Flexibility of Domestic Production: the Kapsiki and their Transformations*. Paper voor congres Political Economy of Cameroon, a historical perspective, 1-4 juni 1988, Leiden.

Van der Geest, S.J.

1987 *Antropologen en missionarissen: verborgen gelijkenissen. Antropologische Verkenningen*, 6(4): pp. 1-18.

Van der Leeuw, G.

n.d. *Phänomenologie der Religion*. Tübingen: Mohr.