Emotional Dimensions of Conversion: An African Evangelical Congregation in Montreal

Géraldine Mossière *Université of Montréal*

Abstract: Drawing on fieldwork conducted in an African evangelical congregation in Montreal, I examine the conversion narrative of a new member. I show that experience of ritual performance is a key element in her trajectory. Various techniques of ritual are used to create an emotional atmosphere that shifts the frame of perception, preparing the would-be member to accept a new system of meaning and a new sense of belonging. In this setting, the "somatic mode of attention" gives rise to a new process of subjectivation which involves the recoding, transformation and purification of the body, the spirit and the self.

Keywords: conversion, ritual, emotion, body, discourse, immigrant

Résumé : Nous examinons le récit de conversion d'un membre d'une congrégation évangélique africaine montréalaise. L'expérience rituelle représente un élément clé dans sa trajectoire. La performance rituelle s'articule autour de techniques discursives et corporelles qui concourent à créer une ambiance effervescente. Ce processus de mise en émotion déplace la grille de perception des membres potentiels et les prépare à accepter un nouveau système de sens et un nouveau sentiment d'appartenance. La manipulation du «mode somatique d'attention» introduit un processus de subjectivation et un mode de déchiffrement de l'expérience axé sur la transformation et la purification du corps, de l'esprit et du soi.

Mots-clés : conversion, rituel, émotion, corps, discours, immigrant

Conversion and Individual Religious Trajectory

The phenomenon of conversion has usually been approached by researchers (Lacar 2001; Snow and Machalek 1984; Travisano et al. 1970) as a fundamental change in a subject's trajectory. Most often, the convert's discourses present the act of conversion as a milestone event from which he divides his life experience into a "before" and an "after." Mary (1998) notes that those conversion narratives are structured according to the newly adopted beliefs and religious values. In her study of the conversion narratives of young Muslims and Christians in the Ivory Coast, Leblanc (2003) found that this experience is usually associated with a notion of re-birth. The new identity is thus compared to a biological life cycle, leading to the rejection of the past (which is "before life began," as it were). For the individual, the decision to convert elicits entirely new behaviours in everyday life, which might include a new way of dressing and a new type and intensity of religious practice (public sermons, proselytizing and so on). The process entails the construction of a new subjectivity, as well as a new sense of belonging to a group, often called "brothers and sisters" (or "brethren"). In West African Christian independent churches, Leblanc (2003) observed that the emergence of a new self is often linked to a reconfiguration of the past and the adoption of new morals supported by the new religious ideology, the whole process leading to the transformation of the convert's identity.

McGuire's (1988) fieldwork in Pentecostal churches in the American suburbs shows that religious membership, and healing rituals in particular, seek to transform and sometimes transcend the self, connecting body and mind as a unified being. The question remains, though, of exactly how religious phenomena such as conversion and rituals alter or recast subjectivity to such an extent that it creates a new disciple. What are the mechanisms

through which such deep religious experiences achieve the reconstruction of the self as a new body and mind, belonging to a new group, abiding by a newly adopted ideology and a well-defined set of new rules? The historian Deslandres (2003) provides us with part of the answer in her study of how European missionaries strove to spread Catholicism among the indigenous peoples of New France in the 16th century. She focusses on the crucial strategy of moving people to join the church by moving them emotionally. This was achieved through a variety of methods; among them, Deslandres underlines spiritual exercises like catechism, collective prayers, hymns and the missionaries' powerful sense of drama. The rhetoric of missionaries' sermons alternated an emphasis on fear, anger and the punishment of the Last Judgment with reassuring messages of Jesus Christ's love and compassion, the whole process leading the audience to an emotional paroxysm of tears and fears. Here Deslandres presents the missionaries' use of emotional tactics as a strategy aiming to reconfigure the symbolic universe of the indigenous peoples and incorporating the new ideology into each person's self, mind and body. Other conversion studies corroborate these conclusions by showing that ritual activity and religious performance create and maintain a spiritual experience that reinforces faith and adherence to the religion (Finn 1997; Turner 1990).

I have had the opportunity to observe the ways in which emotions are mobilized to convince and convert in a much more recent context: an African evangelical congregation located in Montreal. Drawing on this fieldwork, I will demonstrate how various techniques of ritual are used to create an emotional atmosphere that, in turn, helps reconstruct the individual as a member of the group, and moves the self from one symbolic universe to another, leading to conversion. I will first discuss some theoretical considerations that led me to use the anthropology of the body and the concept of emotion for studying conversion. I will describe the fieldwork I carried out in the *Communauté Évangélique de Pentecôte* (CEP) before characterizing this community in greater detail. The conversion trajectory of a particular member of this congregation, whom I will call Marie-Rose, will then be presented in a narrative form. Using this example, I will highlight some of the ritual strategies that emerge from the church's discourses, and argue that working on the prospective convert's emotions is a continuous process structured around ritual as a key element. Finally, I draw on interviews with other members of the congregation in order to show how this ritual religious experience transforms the private, social and bodily self.

Conversion and the Anthropology of the Body

Ritual in the religious experience is understood to play a role in socialization, transmitting the group's norms and integrating a new set of rules (Durkheim 1925; Turner 1972). It conveys ideology to the members or audience through several powerful techniques (Nelson 1996; Tambiah 1985). The performance of ritual also brings the body into play, using it as a vehicle to transform individual perceptions into social symbols that are shared by the group (Fellous 2001). In this regard, concepts developed in the anthropology of the body can be useful for the study of religious experiences, since they make a connection between the phenomenological and the social. As Lyon (1995) suggests, social processes are indeed not only understood through ideas and habits, but also through the body. On the one hand, the body can be seen as the product of social practices of which it is therefore a discourse (Bourdieu 1980; Douglas 1973; Foucault 1963, 1975, 1976); on the other hand it is a perceptual device that plays a key role as the field of construction of the self. Csordas (1993) links perceptual experience (Merleau-Ponty 1971) with collective practice (Bourdieu 1980) in the concept of the "somatic mode of attention," which refers to a culturally determined way of attending to the world with one's body. To account for this interpenetration of mind, body and society, Scheper-Hughes and Lock introduce the unifying concept of the "mindful body." They deconstruct the notion of the body into three dimensions: "the phenomenally experienced individual body-self," the social body as a "natural symbol for thinking about relationships among nature, society and culture" and a body politic as an "artifact of social and political control." (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987:6). As a consequence, the body appears to be an essential site of conversion, since it is where many of the norms and values of the community are inscribed (Cataldi 1993; Lyon 1995; Rosaldo 1983). For both Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987) and McGuire (1990), emotion mediates between these dimensions of the body, acting as a conduit between experience and understanding and getting involved in the action (whatever that action may be). Moreover, Cataldi (1993) argues that profound emotional experiences lead to fundamental changes in an individual's perceptions of, and relationships with, her environment. In short, if an individual is deeply affected, she will never see either the world or herself the same way again. Following the works of McGuire (1996), Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987) and Cataldi (1993), I consider religious conversion to be a complex process activated by emotional experiences which involve

the individual as interconnected in body, mind, self and society. Thus, by approaching the religious ritual through the anthropology of the body, this study sheds new light on conversion experiences.

Methodological Considerations

My research into religious ritual and conversion was conducted in a Pentecostal congregation based in a Montreal neighbourhood of considerable ethnic and religious diversity. For a six-month period, I regularly attended the Sunday services, a formal weekly event that allows all members of the church to gather together. I specifically observed the rituals and their production or "mise en scène." However, in order to document the larger context in which rituals take place, I also attended the various activities organized within the congregation. This ethnographic approach led me to participate in weekly informal gatherings in members' apartments, and in some conferences the pastor gives regularly so as to transmit religious education and knowledge to lay members. For instance, during my fieldwork, the pastor taught a homiletic class aiming at forming new preachers in order to ensure the congregation's future, as he says he is not "eternal."

It is in those small informal groups that personal interactions develop more spontaneously. Although they were not the focus of my research, being present in those sub-groups enabled me to enter some of the congregation's social networks, and to gain access to some respondents. These informal contacts also gave me the chance to interview members of the congregation from a variety of social backgrounds, whose roles in the CEP ranged from leaders of services or ceremonies to newly enrolled members, and whose immigration profiles are as diverse as Congolese refugees and Haitian economic immigrants. The 20 interviews I collected were designed to elicit members' narratives which, as Jackson (1996) notes, do justice to the complexity of the phenomena experienced by a subject by allowing him to identify the dialectics of construction and deconstruction of his life world. In addition to the congregation's ritual life, I was thus able to collect more data on members' religious trajectories and experiences and for the 20 of them, stories of the gradual process that led them to convert. In fact, a minority of the interviewed members had been born into Pentecostal families; they had been part of the CEP since its creation and some of them had even come to know the pastor in Congo or during his studies in Belgium. Nevertheless, the majority of the interviewees had converted to Pentecostalism as adults, either in their country of origin, or in the course of their immigration process to Quebec, and had joined the CEP within the last five years.

The warm welcome the congregation gave me and my research made the fieldwork run smoothly. Nevertheless, since Pentecostalism is a proselytizing movement, I always took care to clearly identify myself as a non-member; the pastor still considers me as a "friend" of the congregation, which is a category of ritual participants who do not belong to the community. This relatively easy access to the congregation provided rich data on the organization of the service, its particular atmosphere and the specific means used to create religious fervour, and the spiritual and ideological messages preached by the minister. In particular, the themes of emotion and feelings that emerged through the observations and that were evoked during interviews raise the following methodological question: how can one study the role of emotion in religious experience without having felt this emotion oneself? Rosaldo et al. (1984) argue that the anthropologist's fieldwork is closely linked to personal life: to understand the Other's emotions requires one to have lived experiences close to the Other's. This argument could be all the more valid for ethnographers of religion; indeed, Proudfoot (1985) considers that atheists researching religious experience are necessarily reductionistic. However, this does not seem entirely fair (particularly given the long tradition of injunctions *against* the anthropologist "going native"). The type of study of emotional religious experience that I have carried out is therefore limited in that its sources of data are confined to external observable manifestations, plus members' accounts. I do not intend to essentialize these fieldwork data as benchmarks of the participants' "true" feelings, but rather treat them as the products of a particular system of religious ritual.

The *Communauté Évangélique de Pentecôte* in Montreal

The CEP's History and Membership

The *Communauté Évangélique de Pentecôte* (CEP) was founded some 10 years ago by the current Congolese pastor, who arrived from Belgium where he had studied theology. During a previous visit to Quebec, he had had a divine vision revealing the province to be the land for his own mission. He therefore decided to immigrate. At first, the CEP was set up in the pastor's living-room and drew only a few participants (mainly his family and his children's friends), but it grew rapidly and now brings some 400 members to a large, recently acquired building. The Church is located in a multiethnic and multireligious neighbourhood of Montreal and the vast majority of its members are Black immigrants. Most are recent arrivals from the Congo or from francophone West Africa who

have fled the wars and insecurity of the last few years. They are generally well-educated people who left relatively materially comfortable conditions to enter Canada with the precarious status and circumstances of political refugees. The CEP also attracts Black people from a prior wave of immigration to Quebec, mainly Haitian men and women with diverse migration trajectories: some came for economic reasons, others immigrated to join their families or to study. Almost all the members of the congregation were raised in a Christian tradition and my fieldwork data revealed that most members from Africa had been converted to Pentecostalism in their country of origin by European and American missionaries, while Haitian members usually came as Catholics and then decided to convert, often after discovering a particular Pentecostal church. In most cases, the members came to know of the CEP through their social network and some of them had attended various churches before sticking with this one. They usually chose the church for reasons of personal affinity and "well-being," which relates to what Yang et al. (2001) call "the new voluntarism" characterizing modern religious life.

Structure of the CEP

Using Ebaugh and Chafetz's (2000) terminology, the CEP can be classified as a religious congregation. Its organizational structure is divided into various ministries, each of which is devoted to a particular task: the ministry of protocol makes sure the Sunday service takes place in a proper and orderly manner, and the ministry of praises prepares the singing period of the service and organizes collective prayers. Some ministries are formed by age or gender: the ministry of women runs cooking or sewing activities while the ministry for teenagers leads discussions on topics such as identity or choosing a husband or wife. Each member is given a role in the congregation, but the responsibility of managing the community as a whole is given to members who are seen to meet particular criteria as defined in the Bible[1]: they must have integrity, a good reputation, a good family and respect for all. At the top of this moral and spiritual hierarchy is the pastor, who is in charge of the whole congregation. Thus, the CEP can be seen as a local institution structured on different levels of activities and based on the personal involvement of its members. On the other hand, it is also organized on a horizontal basis as a community centre for services (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000) divided into various cells spread throughout the city by neighbourhood. Members gather together in the course of the week for less formal meetings, during which sacred activities such as prayers are mixed with the secular, from sharing food and arranging mutual aid to exchanging news from the country of origin or information about the host country. Similarly, the pastor and other leaders often convey information about accommodation or employment during the Sunday service or in topical seminars. The pastor also meets with members by appointment to provide them with personal moral support or counselling. Thus, the CEP represents a physical space in which material, informational and psychological resources are distributed in order to help immigrants settle in their host environment.

The CEP's Religious Activities

The CEP's various units meet and merge together during the Sunday service, which the pastor describes using holistic imagery as like "a human being whose different organs transfer strength to the dynamism of the body." Religious rituals in the community are conducted according to the Pentecostal principles of belief. As a Christian religious movement, one of the variegated offshoots of Protestantism, Pentecostalism is based on a literal reading of the Holy Scriptures and the belief in a direct spiritual relationship between God and the believer. However, Pentecostal faith also includes some practices less common among Protestant denominations, such as speaking in tongues, which is seen as a direct gift from the Holy Spirit to a church member during the service and contributes to the agitated, unrestrained atmosphere that characterizes Pentecostal services.

At the CEP, the Sunday service takes place in French and is open to all visitors. It is mainly made up of two liturgical periods. During the first, which is devoted to prayers and worship, the ministry of praises leads a sequence of songs alternating with meditation. This phase lasts for about 50 minutes, and it is the time for members to sing, dance and worship God with exuberance and warmth; stirring music that sometimes recalls African or Haitian rhythms drives the praise along. Participants express feelings of joy and sometimes sadness with their gestures: raising their hands, swinging their bodies, turning around and around or falling prostrate into their chairs. During this time, some participants seem to experience altered states of consciousness. Leaders encourage the participants' involvement in the ritual through their body language and powerful verbal incitement: "Do you love God?" This period of intense emotional effervescence comes to an end when a spiritual leader, sometimes the pastor, asks for all the participants' attention and preaches for about an hour. The sermon is always based on a reading of the Bible and deals with the spiritual values conveyed by the Holy Scriptures, but it also always focusses on the social and ethical behaviour of the

members of the congregation, providing particularly important guidelines to immigrant members on the paths they should take in their host society. For instance, one sermon dealt with the financial credit on which North American societies are based and which represents the danger of financial and moral bankruptcy for the members. The pastor is equally likely to preach about the kind of gender relations that are acceptable in Canada, around themes such as "How to talk to your wife in Quebec." The service ends with announcements about the community's events. The whole time, the ministry of protocol watches over the progress of the service, welcomes new participants, responds to the particular needs or requests of leaders on the stage and skilfully channels the potentially overflowing emotions among the audience.

Conversion Narratives: Marie-Rose's Story

Congregation members do not consider joining this religious movement to be a conversion as such but rather, a statement of acceptance of Jesus Christ in one's life that logically follows on from a personal experience in which God revealed His presence and love. Although members of the church do consider this event to be a turning point in their trajectory, they believe that God has always been present in their lives but that their "conversion" marks the recognition of his presence and actions. It entails a commitment to worship Him, to receive the good and the bad in life alike as a manifestation of His wishes, to abide by His teachings, and generally to live in His presence. In Brazilian Pentecostal churches, Aubrée (1987) distinguishes three formal steps in joining a congregation: first, the would-be member has to state that she accepts Jesus Christ into her life, then she is officially recognized by the group through the ritual of baptism by immersion, and finally she might experience the phenomenon of speaking in tongues. This last step is perceived as baptism by fire, the new member thus being recognized by God and His emissary, the Holy Spirit. At the CEP, becoming a full member of the church follows a similar sequence of events. To illustrate, I will present the story of Marie-Rose who converted to Pentecostalism after discovering the CEP some five years ago. Her narrative seems particularly salient in that it clearly highlights and synthesizes the various ritual and personal elements that were also mentioned by other interviewees as paving the way to their conversion.

Marie-Rose is a Haitian woman who arrived in Quebec as a teenager some 15 years ago, having left her homeland with her father after her mother's death. She describes her arrival in Montreal as a difficult time, since she suffered discrimination from other students at school. At that time, she attended the Catholic Church on a regular basis, as did her father (her mother had been particularly devout), but some of her cousins belonged to Pentecostal movements and tried to bring her along to their churches. Marie-Rose reluctantly agreed to visit the CEP more out of curiosity than religious interest. In the event, she found the atmosphere quite bizarre with all the shouting, loud music and uninhibited participation and she avoided her cousins' subsequent invitations:

> I found them weird, because I used to go to Catholic Church, which is all quiet. Pentecostals pray loud, they sing loud. But in the Catholic Church, everything is quiet, you are not gonna find loud instruments except the piano. Well I went there and I thought, this place is not for me.

At that time, Marie-Rose had a son and was trying desperately to have a second child. She decided that if God gave her a girl, she would accept Jesus Christ and join the CEP. She finally did conceive a baby girl but forgot about Pentecostal churches until she ran into her cousin, who reminded her of her promise. She agreed to return to the CEP. She felt that her initial contact with the pastor was positive, so she decided to come back with her cousin every Sunday to listen to the sermons, and gradually she got used to the community. Six months later, the church was visited by a prophet who had an especial impact on her. She says:

> There was a man who was talking and talking, he was singing a hymn, I couldn't stop crying and crying, I was wondering "what's wrong with me?" Then I felt something telling me "you're ready now, go for it!" Then the prophet called out, he said "I know someone here is really thirsting for God, come, come up to the front, we are going to pray for you!" I wanted to get up but something was stopping me, but then I stood up and the prophet started to pray for me, asking me if I wanted to accept God in my life.

She said at that point, she was quite vulnerable:

> The hymn that says "You are the only God, you are the only" and there is another one that talks about solving our problems, they really touched me, the moment was well-chosen. I will never forget this hymn; it is the only one that can solve my problems.

A few months later, Marie-Rose was baptized: dressed in white, she was asked by the pastor if she was ready to walk out of her former life, after which she was totally immersed in water in a pool inside the church. Marie-Rose says she felt "really light, like on a cloud. I felt as if a big

weight was being lifted from my shoulders." She was under the impression she had left her old life behind and said: "I was starting a new one. I said now I can start something new with my two children."

Today she says she feels at peace with herself and accepts that God transformed her: "He changed my life, I am no longer the same person and I don't see life the same way any more. I am becoming more mature through the church." She also feels at peace with the world, adding "I no longer see this one as Black, that one as White, now we are human beings. At work, I have white friends, we talk on the phone and so on." Quite apart from being Black, Marie-Rose considers herself above all as a child of God and therefore a sister of her fellow human beings. As a single mother of two, she knew she was sinning by raising her children without a father, so she decided to trust God to choose a husband for her—who will have to be Pentecostal. Joining the Pentecostal movement completely changed the way Marie-Rose lives her everyday life. She feels accompanied by God as a partner, and she talks with him at any time of day "as if to a friend," she explains, "I talk about my problems and I have the sense that He can hear me, do you understand?"

Ritual Techniques for Activating the Emotions of Potential Converts

What can we learn about the relationship between conversion and emotion from this narrative? First of all, conversion is a ritual process that follows specific steps; these gradually create an emotional atmosphere that prepares the individual's subjectivity for joining the community and adopting its perception of the world. Drawing on Moscovici's (1985) model of mass suggestion, I will now discuss three different techniques for creating this atmosphere that involve, respectively, representation, temporality and language. The representation technique structures the ritual space inside the place of worship in order to make a specific impression. The temporal technique uses each symbol to renew and stimulate expressiveness in order to make the atmosphere more conducive to the sharing of simple and strong emotions. Through this process, symbols and their relationships are not just a cognitive typology but they are used as tools to evoke and control powerful emotions. They are also devices mobilized in a precise temporal sequence in order to channel the emotions emanating from the mass of participants. Finally, the linguistic technique is based on the idea that when the audience is in turmoil, it is more receptive to words; discourses and sermons then have a greater capacity to move people to action.

The Ritual Atmosphere Created by Representations

The representation technique helps explain the "weird" atmosphere that Marie-Rose sensed when first attending the Church. The arrangement of the ritual space is rather austere: nearly no decoration except a few streamers on the walls and signs recalling some Bible verses. Chairs are set up on either side of a central alley leading to a stage decorated with maroon fabric, bunches of flowers and the congregation's logotype, a dove flying above a globe in blue and white. Nevertheless, the activities which take place in this arena are designed to transport the individual's body and mind to other dimensions of the self, through the creation of an "emphatic community." This social space supports and encourages the free, immediate and direct expression of emotions that are shared by the group and that help reinforce its cohesion. As Da Matta (1977) notes, the ritual atmosphere is created through the manipulation of relatively trivial elements that are repeated, condensed, exaggerated and fused to add texture to the service. Thus, music has a fundamental role to play in the service and appears to be a means of blurring boundaries between the worldly and the religious spheres (Rouget 1980). The band accompanies the leader on synthesizers, guitars and drums, combining volume, melody and rhythm. In the lively atmosphere this creates, the leaders of the service frequently make emphatic verbal appeals to every member of the audience to praise the Lord in any way they feel, which frames the acceptability of bodily expression, loud prayers, songs, low murmuring and anguished cries.

The church seating traditionally faces the choir, but the leader encourages the faithful to come up and move and dance or sing in front of the audience. The congregation expresses itself at times through collective gestures such as raising their right arms en masse to glorify God. Thus, through the suggestion of the pastor, the congregation comes to share a variety of body movements, which lead to the construction of collective affect. In this way, the use of songs, music and dance involves both the spiritual and bodily dimensions of the self in the religious ritual. The music could be said to touch the inner self of the convert who makes it her own before expressing it through her body. Rouget (1980) shows that ritual music engages the physical, psychological, affective and aesthetic dimensions of the self. Hanna and Blacking (1977) have argued that dance entails a qualitative alteration of the mental process, through a loss of control, a change in one's sense of time and awareness of one's body and a distortion of perceptions. Through dance, gestures and the

activation of the perceptual apparatus, music is inscribed in the ritual space. It instils an emotional charge in the ritual by engaging the subject's sensitivity to the audience and disrupting his sense of being in space and time.

The stimuli of dance and music may catalyze phenomena of altered states of consciousness, including speaking in tongues or *glossolalia* where an individual utters words in an unknown language and accompanies them with gestures; these are seen to be a direct manifestation of the Holy Spirit. In these ways, the church member directly identifies with the divine: he has expressed another dimension of the self, body and mind, which involves a change of identity. Religious fervour during the service is considered to be a sign of God's immediate presence. It demonstrates to the congregation that the service is transcending human, worldly reality and that God is visiting the church in answer to prayers and hymns. As this ritual effervescence builds to a crescendo, it spreads to the entire congregation, creating a space that is freed from the logic of rationality and that fosters an open and direct contact with the transcendent.

The Ritual Temporality of Sermons and Hymns

What about the hymn that shook Marie-Rose up so much? According to Corten (1995), singing in Pentecostalism is a way of creating an emotional setting to foster dance and bodily demonstrations, and maintain the mind and the spirit awake. As mentioned above, the two-hour Sunday service is organized into two parts: the first warms the audience up with music and worship, to prepare it to receive the preacher's message delivered during the second part. During the phase of worship, the band and the choir collaborate to create the ritual atmosphere, alternating high volume songs of praise with low background music to accompany introspection. The conductor of the choir fine-tunes the music and songs and sends body language to the congregation to encourage them to participate through movement and dance. In the interviews I had the occasion to conduct with them, the leaders of the choir explained that when the level of enthusiasm among the audience is not high enough, they play music with vibrant or stirring rhythms to move people to dance. When they feel that the participants are open to spiritual manifestations, they bring in calmer, sweeter music in order to bring them to pray and perhaps even show their altered states of consciousness. Participants are led to open their hands, raise their arms, get up and swing their body. They respond to these musical and verbal messages by clapping along with the beat, crying out, flinging out limbs or shaking their whole bodies, using their bodily resources as ritual tools. Members' expressiveness is thus directly linked to the hymns, and worshipping God is understood as a movement of the heart that extends to a movement of the body. Emotions activated during the hymnal period—feelings of well-being, serenity or joy—can be seen on the members' faces. Here, the body is referred to as an "illustrator" (Ekman and Blacking 1977) in that it symbolizes a message the individual wants to convey: arms open in praise indicate a readiness to receive and give or to be connected with God, both arms raised represents getting closer to God, one arm raised only is a salutation to the divine and a raised fist evokes struggle.

While gesture and dance engage the body in the ritual process, the words of the hymns touch the heart and the spirit. For many participants, the words are the most important element in the first part of the ritual. While some hymns serve to worship God and Jesus Christ directly, others are structured as narratives of the believer's path to God. As Billette (1975) suggests, conversion narratives are built upon selected lived events that are interpreted in terms of the adopted religious ideology. In the CEP, Christian songs of praise of God alternate with those typical of religious revival movements (such as the hymn "God's army is standing up") or of the Haitian or African pop music repertoire. Some hymns express the believers' love and gratitude to God, or describe a powerful and compassionate Jesus Christ dwelling in the hearts of the faithful; in those songs, the topics of worship, recognition of Jesus' power and God's compassion are tirelessly repeated. Other hymns focus on struggling against the hardships of life induced by evil spirits, and describe how God and his vulnerable children empowered by their Father will come out victorious and purified. Converts say they are strengthened by these stories of struggle that the Holy Spirit always wins, because, as one popular chorus runs, "God of victory dwells in us." These hymns describe the believer's path as a journey of struggle between God and Satan as embodied in the believer. The words of hymns lead to a reinterpretation of the converts' past and present through the prism of their new status as God's children, protected by His power. In this way, any recollection of suffering and hardship is transformed into collective joy and hope in the return of Jesus Christ the Saviour and Healer: "Your joy shines my Lord, Your love surrounds us my Lord, that's why we have hope in You."

In this context, singing prepares the ground for being closer to God; the hymns set the foundations for a relationship with God. Through praise, the audience is drawn into an atmosphere of reverence which is meant to symbolize God's presence. The pastor also talks about "setting everybody on an equal footing," which implies creating a

horizontal community, uniform and undifferentiated, while hymns lead gradually towards a collective worshipping of God's gifts and might. The ritual articulation of the body, spirit, self and community is expressed through individual and collective emotion, either through tears of sadness or of joy or through feelings of deep happiness or peace. Ritual intensity is organized through hymns and members' interactions that evoke the participant's path strewn with obstacles and pain. The effervescent atmosphere brings about the sensation of being blessed, transformed, relieved of life's burdens. Thus, the religious experience of the Sunday service reconstructs the individual biography and self within the community.

The Ritual Rhetoric

Finally, what is the role played by the prophet's words?

We have seen that emotion is gradually built up throughout the CEP service. The words pronounced by the leaders of the ritual seem particularly to stimulate this emotional expression. Indeed, leaders punctuate the whole service with powerful statements to encourage people to clap their hands, dance, call on God and feel connected to the divine. The audience's active participation is also expected during the sermon when the leader keeps on asking people to reply by saying "Amen!" at the end of any affirmative or powerful statement, like "God wants me to erase all doubts from my mind!"—"Amen!" The emotional involvement of participants appears to be a prerequisite for the transmission of the sermon. In interviews, the preacher testified that he cannot deliver the divine message if the community is not correctly prepared. The preacher therefore ensures that he keeps participants' senses active by frequently uttering emphatic words after each powerful statement, such as "Those of you who love our Lord clap their hands," and by stimulating audience participation and interaction. The expressiveness thus activated is nonetheless always understood by the audience as the demonstration of the Holy Spirit's gifts to each and every one. The preacher uses different ritual techniques to increase participants' fervour. The responses he obtains increase the quality and intensity of his performance, which, in turn, induces a greater and more enthusiastic collective response. This virtuous circle generates more and more intense expression, escalating towards a climax. The aim is always to move the audience: a weak reaction calls for a change of tactic to indicate the leader's (or God's) need for a better response. For instance, the pastor might call explicitly for greater participation: "Anyone say Amen?" or "God lives on Amens, do not let God starve!" At the end, each forceful "Amen" shows the audience agrees and supports the message.

In this way, the preacher and the audience interact: members send messages and signals through body language (looks, attitudes, gestures) that the preacher is supposed to decipher and to which he is meant to reply. Words chosen by the preacher are designed to captivate the audience; the participants' reaction is demonstrated through the body with dances, cheers and words to God. These perceptible gestures—including facial expressions and symbols such as the raising of arms—can be understood to express feelings of connection to the divine. As the leaders' linguistic performance constantly stimulates such spontaneous bodily and mental involvement from the audience, it induces an emotional state, which prepares them to accept the content of the sermon. The religious discourse is thus incorporated as a new frame of perception of the world, or a new "canon" as Luckmann (1999) would call it.

During the Sunday service, topics are also debated in connection with the community's needs. For instance, at the end of 2003, the pastor developed the idea of "fighting on," to cheer up members who, looking back on their year, might be disappointed. Sermons at the CEP do tackle spiritual values linked to the Scriptures. Nevertheless, the examples used by the pastor to clarify biblical verses convey a missionary ideology aiming to transform the immigrant's trajectory into that of a citizen's. For instance, he often reminds the audience to "leave the social welfare programs, that is not your place, go back to studying." On a broader scale, the topics of the sermons deal with change and metamorphosis, in order to comfort particular members whose immigration experience has put them to the test, as well as to transmit new normative principles. Based on a close and literal reading of the Bible, sermons elaborate on each religious "truth" to link it with the convert's life, so as to touch him, underscore his condition and show what God expects from him. The legitimacy of the normative message is based, on the one hand, on the Bible as the exclusive source of truth and, on the other hand, on the preacher as the exclusive authority in conveying God's message. The preacher's legitimacy is certainly justified by the fact that he studied the Bible, but above all by the fact that the Holy Spirit lets him receive God's messages and deliver them to God's people. In this sense, the production and transmission of sermons are ritually organized and controlled by the pastor.

The message is delivered through three media which combine to make the normative principles conveyed appear consistent and logical: language, tone of voice and gesture. These communicative strategies are close to the politician's: the assertions are biting, concise and precise,

just like Jesus who, as the pastor once said, used to "shock, talk bluntly and accuse." The preacher also uses the emotional power of certain words and phrases and relies on repetition to transform mere ideas into convictions and to stigmatize divergent opinions. Themes are repeated several times, and the key points of the sermon are sometimes projected onto acetates for the community to read, for instance, "Trust in God, if the year 2003 leaves you with bitter memories, trust in God." The pastor also employs rhetorical plays on words that are easy to remember and convey ideological concepts in a polished rhythm, such as "TV informs you, school forms you, God transforms you."

Through different techniques of ritual, singing and discourse, the combined performances of the preacher and the choir engage each participant's body and spirit, as do the audience's collective reactions and interactions. In this way, subjects become a site of interaction between body, mind, self and society. The worship and occasional altered states of consciousness such as speaking in tongues directly mobilize each participant's expressiveness and bring the community to an emotional climax which unites the self, the body and the community. This whole process transforms the members, who now believe that they are inhabited by the Holy Spirit and guided by the Divine. In this context, Marie-Rose's conversion to the CEP is a continuous process in that each service she attended gradually built up an emotional state that was intended to prepare her to adopt a new religious frame of perception.

A Transformative Experience Involving Different Dimensions of the Self

The conversion narratives of the members I encountered often indicate a feeling of re-birth and renewal, characterized by a belief in the tenets of a new orthodoxy. Although the act of conversion can seem like a trigger that is pulled at a precise moment in life, it is more the product of a long persuasive process that eventually overcomes the subject's resistance. Thus, the path of the convert usually starts with his repentance, which then acquires deeper implications through subsequent personal experiences full of strong emotions and, in the end, a sense of wholeness. The convert's baptism, which marks the end-point of this process, often involves an impression of weightlessness symbolized by water: it relieves the convert of the burden of the past and purifies his body and spirit through total immersion. Marie-Rose testifies:

> The day I was baptized was really, I felt so light, it was like I needed something to hang around my neck [to weigh me down], because, it was really, I was on a cloud. It was such an experience, hard to say how, bizarre but still good for me. I said "Ah" and I felt so light, after, when I had been immersed in the baptismal waters I said "Oh, it's like all the weight that was dragging me down has been lifted away." You know? I said "there, now I can start something new with my two children."

An Emotional Experience

As Corten (1995) notes, Pentecostal baptism is not so much an institutionalized liturgical ceremony as it is an emotional event: it results from an intense and mystical feeling of being in touch with God, which is expressed in hymns and in the leaders' ritual interventions that are taken to be messages from God. God's presence thus staged can bring about feelings of dirtiness and shame that are expressed through tears. These are instinctive demonstrations that the convert cannot hold back, as Marie-Rose reports, "I used to be shy, before, but I am not shy any more. I would arrive and wouldn't dare cry but the tears would roll down on their own, they would roll down on their own." In this sense, the body is a signifier. Still, during the effervescence of the ritual tears can have other meanings: they may symbolize fear of the Last Judgment, sadness or despair at the miserable condition of the human being; they may also convey joy and hope in the fact that from now on, the convert's life has been brought within the scope of a system of meanings linked with the divine. For David, one of the CEP's ministers:

> The Holy Spirit enlightens you, He really shows you your condition, your basic condition and if you stay in that state, it is inevitable, you will be judged by God. It's so clear in your mind that the only thing that pushes you forward is...You feel the joy of being Christian, the joy of being saved, OK. But also He sheds a little light on where it was you were, the fear in the darkness where you were, the sin where you were, the perdition....It's a bit like being sad about your life and happy at the same time. So between the two, you cry, like this, you feel something, you feel something even if you don't cry, but you feel that your life is different, your life is changing, it's because the Word you are reading is true.

Thus conversion emerges from cumulative sensations of concrete experiences with God; deeper and more personal each time, they provoke a gradual shift in perception of the universe. Myriam, another member of the Congregation talks about her conversion's "sweetness" and "progress" and she evokes her own experience of God:

> Let me tell you, I was a rationalist of the most convinced kind, so if I've changed sides, it's not because I

> had a shock, it's because I had real experiences with the Lord. Besides, to get involved to that extent, I must have had concrete experiences, they must have been real. And with God, you live real live experiences.

The emotions aroused during the services are considered by the converts to be joy replacing everyday pain and suffering; this perception is reinforced by their conviction that God acts to heal them and enrich their lives. Prayer is seen as a refuge in times of sorrow where the convert will find advice, comfort, and the strength to accept every day's hardships thanks to his trust in God and the acceptance of His choices. Marie-Rose remembers, "He says that, in his Word, 'Always be happy.' So because You (God) knew that I was going to have problems, You tell me 'Always be happy, always be joyful, never stop praying.' That's what He says, never stop praying."

A Transformative Experience

Through the conversion experience, the new member is touched by the Holy Spirit which from then on will direct, inspire and advise her and above all, grant her an array of spiritual gifts (speaking in tongues, interpretation, etc.). This sense of embodying the Holy Spirit transforms the convert's sense of self, and leads her to abide by a new set of rules shared with other members she will henceforth recognize as brethren.

The respondents talk about conversion as the moment of truly "becoming a Christian" and they see this step as indicating a clear personal involvement with God. David explains that conversion "doesn't work through genetic transmission or the transmission of values"; it is the personal commitment of an informed person which can be compared to marriage. It also involves a new system of meanings constructed through a new code of dress, food and conduct, as well as new religious practices including the form and frequency of sermons, public meetings, ceremonies and so on. Subscribing to this new ideology entails the transformation of both personal and social status, since difference is no longer a matter of race or ethnicity but is rather established along religious categories such as having been baptized or not. Each member now embodies the Holy Spirit, enabling him to be acknowledged amongst the community of his brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. Witness Marie-Rose's feeling that religious identity and feeling of belonging now transcend ethnic markers.

On the other hand, the embodiment of the Holy Spirit also transforms the convert's subjectivity: his actions and perceptions do not seem to belong to him any longer since God now lives in the subject, through the Holy Spirit, and guides him towards new priorities. As David says, "You don't do anything, it's the Holy Spirit who acts through you." This new form of subjectivation distances the convert from her former everyday concerns, as Elizabeth, another CEP's member, notes:

> The moment I received Him, I felt it, and later on it stayed: I wasn't quite sure yet but it was like something had changed deep inside of me, nothing was quite the same. Then I understood that it was because of the Lord, because now I had given Him my life, I said to Him, "Look after my life." Because when you welcome Him into your life, you say "Lord, come into my life, take over and guide my life" and then, the One who enters, He guides my life, He takes care of all my concerns, my problems.

The respondents often state that after the conversion, "you understand life in another way." This global transformation of the convert as a body, spirit, self and member of the community is expressed by a discourse of peace, serenity and trust. For Myriam,

> Even if the roof falls in on my head, I am full of joy, nobody can take away my joy from me. There are signs that God's spirit comes to me. Things that used to drive me crazy before are no longer my problem. I can say "I don't agree with that" and still be happy.

Conclusion

In the CEP, the performance of the Sunday service is orchestrated through both bodily and discursive strategies. These ritual strategies aim, on the one hand, to mobilize the audience's fervour by stimulating the expression of their emotions, and, on the other hand, to prepare them to receive the biblical message. In this setting, the body plays a key role as a field of construction of the self; it is the interface of what Csordas (1993) calls the "somatic mode of attention." At the CEP, the somatic mode of attention is activated through ritual; it involves a new process of subjectivation which includes a new coding of the self centred on the transformation and purification of the body, the spirit and the self. During the sermon, a new frame of perception of the self is suggested, giving prominence to the believer's divine dimension and his embodiment of the Holy Spirit. In this context, the very moment of conversion symbolized in Pentecostal baptism by the statement of acceptance of Jesus Christ in one's life appears as a turning point in his journey. The feelings expressed during the service are henceforth experienced as manifestations of the Holy Spirit; they are also considered to be

part of a personal language and conversation shared with God.

Furthermore, the very act of participating in the service integrates the convert into a new system of meaning uniting religious experience with everyday life, the spiritual being with the citizen, and the sacred with the secular. This perception of the world is especially attractive to immigrants who have lost their points of reference and are likely to experience marginalization or isolation in a host society whose values seem to be opposite to their own. Once the individual has joined the religious community, her social environment becomes a new universe, punctuated by occasional signals purposefully sent by God. As for the migratory journey, it now appears as a path travelled in the company of the Lord, who is considered as a partner and active source of support. The new convert perceives herself as God's servant, which fills her with joy since it accentuates her own grace. Embodying the social and religious discourse of the community and adopting its verbal and physical language commit the convert to a new mode of action and behaviour which will guide her journey in the host society.

My study has focussed on the means of expression of the self during ritual in order to stress its transformative capacity on the trajectory of the convert. I have taken a phenomenological approach, using notions of the "somatic mode of attention" and "embodiment" suggested by Csordas (1993). I have, however, limited the use of device to the external demonstrations of religious experience since I have not myself experienced it. This raises the question of the extent of the researcher's participation in the congregation under study. As I was considered a friend to the CEP, but never became more deeply involved in the community, my fieldwork was based only on the observations and interviews I was able to conduct. However, by attending the weekly Sunday service for six months, my observer position has gradually evolved toward a more participatory one. Indeed, without ever experiencing altered states of consciousness or Holy Spirit manifestations, I have often been emotionally touched by the effervescent atmosphere, which led me to become part of the ritual and ephemeral community without being a formal member of the congregation. Others have opened up the debate to consideration of the ethical and anthropological issues that doing fieldwork in religious community raises (Jules-Rosette 1975; Mary 2000). For me, this problematic is closely linked to the researcher's identity and their level of identification with the congregation's ritual and dogma.

Géraldine Mossière, Département d'Anthropologie, Université de Montréal, 3150, rue Jean-Brillant, Bureau C-3072, Montréal Québec, H3T 1N8, E-mail: Geraldine.Mossiere@umontreal.ca

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Professor Deirdre Meintel for her thoughtful advice and suggestions in the course of writing the article. I would also like to thank Martha Radice for revising the article.

Note

1 Timothy, Chapter 3, Verses 1 to 13.

References

Aubrée, Marion
1987 Les Orixas et le Saint-Esprit au secours de l'emploi (deux stratégies d'insertion socio-économique dans le Nordeste brésilien). Cahier de Sciences Humaines 23(2):261-272.

Billette, André
1975 Récits et réalités d'une conversion. Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal.

Bourdieu, Pierre
1980 Le sens pratique. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit.

Cataldi, Sue L.
1993 Emotion, Depth, and Flesh. New York: Suny Press.

Corten, André
1995 Le Pentecôtisme au Brésil: Émotion du pauvre et Romantisme théologique. Paris: Karthala.

Csordas, Thomas J.
1993 Somatic Modes of Attention. Cultural anthropology 8(2):135-156.

Da Matta, Roberto
1977 Constraint and Licence: A Preliminary Study of Two Brazilian National Rituals. *In* Secular Ritual, S.F. Moore and B.G. Myerhoff, eds. Pp. 244-64. Amsterdam: Van Gorcum.

Deslandres, Dominique
2003 Croire et faire croire. Les missionnaires français au XVI[e] siècle. Paris: Fayard.

Douglas, Mary
1973 Natural symbols: Exploration in cosmology. New York: Random House.

Dürkheim, Émile
1925 Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse. Paris: Bibliothèque de Philosophie Contemporaine.

Ebaugh, H.R., and J.S. Chafetz
2000 Religion and the new immigrants. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Ekman, Paul, and John Blacking
1977 Biological and Cultural Contributions to Body and Facial Movement. London: Academic Press.

Fellous, Michèle
2001 A la recherche de nouveaux rites. Rites de passage et modernité avancée. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Finn, Thomas M.
1997 From Death to Rebirth: Ritual and Conversion in Antiquity. New York: Paulist Press.
Foucault, Michel
1963 Naissance de la clinique. Une archéologie du regard médical. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
1975 Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison. Paris: Gallimard.
1976 Histoire de la sexualité, vol. 1: La volonté de savoir. Paris: Gallimard.
Hanna, Judith Lynne, and John Blacking
1977 To Dance Is Human. London: Academic Press.
Jackson, Michael
1996 Things as They Are: New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology: Indiana University Press.
Jules-Rosette, Benetta
1975 African Apostles: Ritual and Conversion in the Church of John Maranke. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
Lacar, Luis Q.
2001 "Balik"-Islam: Christian Converts to Islam in the Philippines. Islam and Christian Muslim Relations 12(1):39-60.
LeBlanc, Marie-Nathalie
2003 Les trajectoires de conversion et l'identité sociale chez les jeunes dans le contexte postcolonial Ouest-africain: Les jeunes musulmans et les jeunes chrétiens en Côte d'Ivoire. Anthropologie et Sociétés 27(1):85-110.
Luckmann, Thomas
1999 The Religious Situation in Europe: The Background to Contemporary Conversions. Social Compass 46(3):251-258.
Lyon, Margot
1995 Missing Emotion: The Limitations of Cultural Constructionism in the Study of Emotion. Cultural Anthropology 10(2):244-263.
Mary, André
1998 Le voir pour y croire: Expériences visionnaires et récits de conversion: Parcours de conversion. Journal des africanistes 68(1-2):173-196.
2000 L'anthropologie au risque des religions mondiales. Anthropologie et sociétés 24(1):117-135.
McGuire, Meredith B.
1988 Ritual Healing in Suburban America. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
1990 Religion and the Body: Rematerializing the Human Body in the Social Sciences of Religion. Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 29(3):283-296.
1996 Religion and Healing the Mind/Body/Self. Social Compass 43(1):101-116.
Merleau-Ponty, M.
1971 Phénoménologie de la Perception. Paris: Gallimard.
Moscovici, Serge
1985 The Age of the Crowd: A Historical Treatise on Mass Psychology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Nelson, Timothy J.
1996 Sacrifice Praise: Emotion and Collective Participation in an African-American Worship Service. Sociology of Religion 57(4):379-396.
Prooudfoot, Wayne
1985 Religious Experience. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Rosaldo, Michelle Z.
1983 The Shame of Headhunters and the Autonomy of the Self. Ethos 11(3):135-150.
Rosaldo, Michelle, Richard A. Shweder and Robert A. LeVine
1984 Toward an Anthropology of Self and Feeling. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Rouget, Gilbert, and John Blacking
1977 Music and Possession. London: Academic Press.
Rouget, Gilles
1980 La musique et la transe. Paris: Gallimard.
Scheper-Hughes, Nancy, and M.M. Lock
1987 The Mindful Body. Medical Anthropology Quarterly 1(1):6-41.
Snow, David A. and Richard Machalek
1984 The Sociology of Conversion. Annual Review of Sociology 10:167-190.
Tambiah, Stanley Jeyaraja
1985 Culture, Thought, and Social Action: An Anthropological Perspective. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Travisano, R.V., G.P. Stone and H.A. Faberman
1970 Alternation and Conversion as Qualitatively Different Transformations. Waltham, MA: Ginn-Blaisdell.
Turner, Victor
1972 Les tambours d'affliction: Analyse des rituels chez les Ndembu de Zambie. Paris: Gallimard.
1990 Le phénomène rituel: structure et contre-structure. Paris: Presse universitaire de France.
Yang, F., and H.R. Ebaugh
2001 Transformations in New Immigrant Religions and Their Global Implications. American Sociological Review 66:269-88.