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1. Flirting with Conversion: Negotiating Researcher Non-Belief with Missionaries

Hillary K. Crane

Despite the best efforts of anthropologists to explain our research, we are often misidentified by the communities in which we research, who cast us into more familiar categories for outsiders—as colonial authorities, religious missionaries, or CIA spies. Our attempts to be both part of and separate from the communities we investigate contribute to the problem. We are professional border crossers (Lukens-Bull, 2007); we are outsiders who try to learn to be insiders but nevertheless remain different and somewhat detached. Our difference from the communities we study, whether due to citizenship, ethnicity, or class, allows all involved to know the relative unlikelihood of our completely going native. With this barrier to full membership firmly in place, we may learn to walk and talk like insiders but our true status is never in doubt. We come from elsewhere and will eventually return there. While we may be altered by our experiences in the field, such transformation has limits. We usually do not become members of the groups we study. Truly joining is rarely an option.

Anthropologists researching within missionizing communities, however, can become members of the communities we study. In these contexts, the pre-existing category for an outsider expressing interest in the community is not a spy or a colonial authority, but a potential convert. Indeed, our efforts to cross boundaries and to learn to behave like insiders are often interpreted by the communities we research as signaling a personal interest in conversion. Even if we explain that we are only professionally interested in learning about religious practices, our engagement may lead missionaries to impose upon us their own categories fraught with religious significance. The community may pray for, invite, or pressure the researcher to convert and the researcher's apparent willingness to engage in religious discourse or participate in religious ritual may be given religious interpretation, as Susan Harding finds when the ministers she attempts to interview take the opportunity to witness to her (1987). A community's repositioning of the researcher as religious seeker provides a conveniently well-trod and welcoming path by which an anthropologist can enter a communi-

ty, but if we use it does it misrepresent our purpose to those we study, and even to ourselves?

While the possibility that missionizing communities will misunderstand our interest in their lives and teachings is problematic, a further complication may be a researcher's own personal relationship to religion. The default posture of most social scientists may be to treat religion with skepticism, but some anthropologists have raised doubts that this stance produces the greatest insight. E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1965) and Victor Turner (1962) each suggest that true understanding of religious belief requires that the researcher also have an experience of belief (Engelke, 2002). Although they study religions other than their own, they argue that their ability to experience belief provides them insight not available to doubting researchers whose ultimate ulterior motives they find suspect. Susan Harding suggests that she is someplace between disbelief and belief, "standing in the gap," when she defines her field site as a linguistic space or gap, or as the crossroads between being lost and being saved (2000:xi). Although not explicitly discussing religious belief, sociologist Kenneth Liberman argues that researchers should have "a genuine, and not merely feigned, respect for the social practices that we study" and that we ought to make ourselves "open to transformation by those practices" (1999:53-54). What would the implications be for our research if instead of taking a firm stance against, with, or between, we remained open to the possibility of truth and revelation in the religions that we investigate and allowed ourselves to be moved by them?

In this article, I will discuss my research in a Taiwanese Buddhist monastery. I approached my research with a genuine respect for the beliefs and practices of those I was studying and kept myself "open to transformation," which proved to be an awkward fieldwork stance, as my responses to the beliefs and practices and my personal transformations were not only idiosyncratic, but also multiple and contradictory. I also came to the field as a former Catholic who necessarily imposed on the context my own understanding, which provided a particular lens through which to perceive the phenomena I researched. As Paul Clough (2006) finds when reflecting on his own writings and memories of fieldwork, his perception of the Islamic community he studied was profoundly shaped by his own background in Catholicism. Although religion is not the focus of his study, in retrospect he realizes that his interpretations of economic practices were colored by his understanding of his research subjects' religious inclinations and those understandings were in turn shaped by his own background as a Catholic. Similarly, my perspective as a former Catholic colored my understandings of Buddhist phenomena. This personal religious history and identification affected my research in ways similar to the experiences of Simone Schweber (2006), who also studies a religious community with which she has a complex history and another in which she is an outsider. I will argue that although my Catholic background influenced my understanding of the Buddhist monastery, the effect was more profound when I studied *Catholics*.

Beyond the difficulties of having one's research interests misinterpreted by the community one is researching and the ambiguities that result from remaining open to conversion when studying religious communities, I will also examine the further difficulty confronted when researching religious personnel who have an interest in representing their religious ideals both to and through the researcher. The community saw my research as a potential means to reach a broader audience with their message, and to that end worked to ensure that I saw them in an ideal light. This introduced another factor influencing my research and another puzzle for the researcher: was my research flawed when it failed to reach past this ideal they endeavored to embody?

With these complexities in mind, I will examine my time in the Buddhist monastery during which I sent mixed signals to my host community—both expressing interest in conversion and refusing it. I will also explore my personal ambivalence about my own religious sentiments while in the field. I will show that my attempt to walk the line between objective researcher and open-minded potential believer, and the monastics' resulting attempts to provide what I needed and yet maintain a monastic ideal, resulted in an awkward dance in which I both welcomed and rejected their religious overtures and they both revealed and hid themselves from my researcher's gaze. Ultimately I argue that fieldwork conducted among missionaries is laden with unique difficulties and ethical ambiguities that highlight and exaggerate issues that arise in a variety of fieldwork contexts.

Mixed Signals

To research the gender identities of Taiwanese Buddhist nuns, I lived in Taiwan for approximately two years, during which time I participated in a number of retreats at both Pure Land and Chan (Zen) temples, attended classes at a Chan meditation center, and lived for several months at a large Chan monastery. Entering these Buddhist contexts, I found immediately that I had to make regular decisions about which ritual actions I would and would not participate in as I tried to communicate to the community my carefully considered fieldwork position.

I am not alone in experiencing this difficulty; many anthropologists of religion have struggled to find an appropriate way to appear as more than a visitor, but at the same time not enter too far into the community. In her ethnography of a Greek shrine, Jill Dubisch describes the difficulty she finds in trying to move more fully into the shrine than a tourist but not signal full membership. She finds that lighting candles and donating money provide a "satisfactory ritual behavior" with which she can move inside the church at her field site. She opts not to kiss the icons or make the sign of the cross—actions that would mark her as a full member of the religious community (1995:111). Similarly, Simone Schweber (2007:63-66) explains the difficult choices she has to make and their

corresponding implications for the communities she studies in the research she conducts in religious schools. She describes feeling keenly ambivalent about whether or not to participate in ritual actions at a conservative Jewish school where she conducts research:

> I sometimes wished to perform the ritual, hoping to show the girls in the room that I was like them, of them, if at a different point on the continuum of Jewish practice, not to mention a different stage of life. And yet, simultaneously, I didn't want, even symbolically, to seem beholden to the myth that greater observance of ritual promotes a more authentic Judaism. I felt that if I kissed the mezuzah, I might be seen as someone whose ritual observance was increasing . . . In short, I didn't want to appear as the researcher "going native." (2007:64)

I similarly struggled to find an adequate happy medium that would move me far enough inside, but still allow me to retain my autonomy and what I felt would be a respectful distance from rituals and practices of a faith community in which I was not a believing member.

When nuns and fellow retreaters encouraged me to participate in a *chao shan* (a pilgrimage up a mountain doing prostrations), I did not want to do it. Not only did it sound unpleasant and painful, I also thought that by participating as a non-believer, I would somehow diminish the event. They, however, did not see this as a problem and after quite a bit of pressure, I found myself going barefoot up a mountain doing prostrations. During the ritual, which lasted several hours and left me with bleeding feet, knees, and hands as well as a bruised forehead, I repeatedly lost my focus on the chant and instead asked myself if I was doing what a good anthropologist is supposed to do. Was I really gaining good field data when surely my experience of this ritual was wholly different from those around me? Was it dishonest to participate when I didn't believe, and what signals did this participation send to those around me?

Those I was observing did not share my concerns that my participation in ritual acts would diminish them for the community. I was told repeatedly that actions generate karma, good or bad, no matter the motivations of those performing them. As long as I was doing the acts, those around me believed I was enhancing my karma as well as theirs, as they'd had a role in persuading me to better mine. Despite these reassurances, I felt uncomfortable participating and acting as if I believed. This discomfort was stronger when I found myself in situations that required prostrations before an individual monastic. Although the specific meanings associated with full prostrations in the temple context were explained to me as simply being signs of respect, my own cultural baggage made prostrating myself before another individual, even one I respected, feel degrading and as though I were making a promise of obedience. Trying to maintain some autonomy in a community where everyone else had taken an oath to obey the Master was problematic, and I was concerned the prostrations would send the wrong message about my willingness to submit to their authority as if I

were a believer—if not to the community who had their own understandings of the act, then to myself.

I did perform prostrations, as to not do so would have been awkward in situations where they were expected, and I adhered to temple rules to not kill, drink alcohol, dress immodestly, etc., although I did bend some of the rules by climbing a fence to go jogging early in the mornings and by providing music to a monk who'd asked for some. Although I followed rules and participated in many rituals, I felt strongly that in order to maintain some autonomy I could not participate in the ritual that would fully make me a member of the community: the ceremony of taking the three refuges (in the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha), and taking the temple's Master as my Master, although monastics made arrangements for me to participate in this ritual. My refusal was met with consternation at the temple. They regularly made arrangements for lay members of the community for similar ritual opportunities, or even to be given an opportunity to request to be tonsured (to remove the hair as a sign of worldly renunciation) without the individual's prior knowledge or expressed intention. Although I found this practice alarming, generally lay community members accept these opportunities with resignation, assuming that fate had intended it to be so, even if it meant being tonsured without having previously desired the opportunity. For me to continue to resist after living in the temple for several months must have seemed odd to those in the community who believed fate had provided them similar opportunities which they hadn't denied. Many lay people do live at the temple, and this role perhaps made my research possible—they were used to having lay people around who were interested in the monastic life. The rest, however, were there as disciples of the Master—there to learn from his teachings—and to balk so vehemently when provided with such an opportunity was unusual. I regularly second-guessed this decision. Should the anthropologist just go with the flow? Should I have said "when in Rome" and gone along with their plans? If I had, would I have started down a path that led to better field data, or one that led to my becoming a nun?

My choices—to prostrate, to participate in the mountain pilgrimage and retreats, but not to take the vows that would technically make me a member of the community—probably seemed arbitrary to those I was living with. The partially in/partially out position that I attempted to inhabit as an anthropologist already had a firm definition in this community that was different than the one I tried to shape for myself, and my choices did not fit this preexisting category. As Harding (1987) finds in her research with an American Christian community, no matter how the researcher describes her intentions, religious communities will interpret the researcher's presence according to their own expectations. Someone who's partly inside and partly out is understood as a seeker, as someone who is trying the religion on to see if it fits, someone who is open to, and on some level perhaps seeking, persuasion. Our techniques of learning the religious language, asking questions and listening all appear to verify the interpretation that they impose on us.

Indeed this fieldwork experience was a rite of passage for me, which may have added to the confusion of my research role with that of a religious seeker. While in the field I was in a liminal phase, moving from being a graduate student into a new status as a professional anthropologist with a PhD. The lay people around me at the temple who were in the process of leaving behind their previous lives in the world and becoming religious personnel were similarly in a liminal phase that overlapped with mine. The outcomes were certainly different, but the betwixt and between roles were virtually indistinguishable, and that I was on a different trajectory, with the doctorate and not a religious life as my goal, may have been readily apparent only to me.

The community I studied may have imposed a seeker role on me in part because they were themselves learning to missionize. Many of the monastics at the monastery were newly ordained. They were in the process of learning more about Buddhism and about how to teach others about Buddhism. Although they believed that there are many equally valid paths to the truth, they viewed theirs as the best, most direct path, and were interested in convincing others of the rightness of their beliefs and the benefits of living a good Buddhist life. As the only non-believer in their midst, I had essentially thrown myself into the lion's den. They took most conversations with me as opportunities to try to convince me to join them, preferably as a nun.

Some of my attempts to resist this pressure were more successful than others. At first, I started with the truth: although I was very interested in Buddhism, I wasn't a believer, and therefore it wasn't the life for me. This approach was always met with attempts to persuade me to believe—and perhaps was seen as a challenge to their missionizing abilities. I then tried explaining that I was happy "in the world" and didn't want to leave it, which proved a poor strategy when talking with people who had made the commitment to "leave the world" and their lives behind in order to follow this new life. If they could do it, so could I. Eventually, I had to bend the truth. The only explanation that would work was the one used by those in the temple who had not yet elected to be tonsured: I said I had to stay in the world and return to America to take care of my parents, who had no one else. Resorting to the excuse of filial piety and essentially saying I had no choice generated understanding and pity from those who had been applying pressure, and was the only way I could get relief from the attempts to get me to become a nun.

Ambivalent Feelings

I chose to study a Buddhist community in part because of previous experiences studying a group whose religion I had been raised with, but had personally rejected. As a former Catholic studying Catholics in the Seattle area, I had certain advantages and disadvantages. For one, I knew much of what my field subjects were doing and how their ritual acts were presented and interpreted by the

church. This inside knowledge led to some convenient shorthand, but may have also caused me to take too much for granted and to impose my own understandings on their actions. Another issue with studying Catholics came from their religious interpretation of my role as researcher. My inside knowledge, coupled with my obvious interest in their beliefs and practice, belied my protests that I was not a believer and did not intend to become one. They saw my interest in their religious practices as a sign that I was being called back to the church. I still carried enough Catholic guilt to feel that I'd done something wrong to mislead them and raise their hopes. Knowing for certain that I didn't want to become a member of the faith community seemed like an awkward and possibly disingenuous way to pursue fieldwork. I was both firmly inside, having been raised in the faith, and firmly outside, having rejected it. I also felt uniquely unable to reach the cool detachment I strove for, and instead dwelled on aspects of the religion I found distasteful.

With Buddhism, in which I had some personal interest but no prior history, I felt I could conduct more honest fieldwork. Although I was not a believer, I was open to the possibility of becoming one. I felt that Buddhism had something to teach me, and I didn't have a history of having rejected the faith.

I entered the field genuinely interested in learning what Buddhism would have to teach me. I was particularly interested in the meditation practices which are the focus of Chan (or Zen) temples, but when I started I was also interested in learning more broadly about techniques like chanting that are practiced in Pure Land temples. The first retreat I attended was at a Pure Land temple and involved chanting in various ways and performing prostrations. We woke for our first sessions at 2:30 a.m. and had several sessions taking up the day with breaks for meals (although no food was consumed after noon), a midday nap, and ending sometimes after midnight. The work was strenuous and required quite a bit of endurance. My response to this regimen swung wildly between being awestruck by the grandeur of the temple and the beauty of hundreds of voices chanting in unison to extreme boredom or frustration with the lack of sleep and the rigid postures the nuns required we maintain. While I was initially a bit proud that I'd managed to fold my bedding in the precise way they'd demonstrated when many other retreaters had made small mistakes and had to refold, I eventually became somewhat petulant when the evening's lectures would go past midnight and we'd have less than two hours to sleep before the morning gong. Sometimes when we chanted, I'd feel a closeness and communion with those around me and a desperate desire never to leave, indeed to never stop chanting. Other times I'd spend entire sessions feeling that saying a Bodhisattva's name over and over was profoundly silly, and actively restraining myself from jumping up and fleeing. Retreats are intense experiences and my responses to them were similarly forceful. Rather than the cool detachment or open-mindedness I'd imagined myself having in the field, every moment was filled with a strong emotion of one type or another, and these emotional extremes—not the lessons or the meditations—are what I remember most keenly.

Although the meditation retreats at Chan temples were quite different, in many respects my experiences were similar. The frustration I felt on these retreats was not with the schedule or a lack of connection to the teachings, but instead with myself and my own inability to be content with sitting still in contemplation for more than twelve hours a day. I also found myself oddly, irrationally angry with a fidgety woman who sat next to me through one retreat. Monastics told me that my experiences were quite normal and that frustration with oneself and others is part of what one must overcome. Although frustration was central to my experience, even more profound were feelings of both peace and overwhelming compassion, which monastics also said were regularly part of the experience. I would have imagined that bringing my own personal and cultural baggage to meditation would have made my experience harder to predict, but indeed the most memorable aspect of my retreat experiences was feeling profoundly moved by compassion for individuals I loved and hated, knew and didn't know, and most surprisingly, for myself.

Although I was prepared to see reason in Buddhism and open to be persuaded by its teachings (which for the most part did not happen), I was unprepared to be emotionally swept up even as I doubted the truth of what I was being exposed to, particularly at the Pure Land temple. The moments of profound compassion that felt transcendent were unexpected and difficult to interpret. Sharing in these experiences with those I was studying both helped me to understand why monastics would choose the religious life, and enabled me to follow much more of what they tried to teach me than I would have been able to understand without these experiences. My experiences were likely different from theirs because they were shaped by my own personal and cultural background, but nevertheless, I feel that they created some kind of bridge over the gap between belief and disbelief that Harding identifies. Rather than residing in a coolly detached position in between, though, my reactions swung from extreme aversion to profound yearning, all keenly felt.

My retreat experiences gave me a shared knowledge to discuss with the community I was researching. This was clearly an advantage, and my having participated signaled a personal interest, even investment, in Buddhist teachings, which was also useful for establishing trust. The extent to which my emotional responses to religious ritual influenced my analysis is difficult to measure. Calling similar responses "the warm and the cool spots, the emergence of positive and negative feelings, the experiences [he] wanted more of or wanted to avoid," Peshkin (1986:18) works to label them, control for them, and maintain his objectivity for his research in a conservative Christian school. Jill Dubisch describes being moved by the pain of pilgrims and responding to the emotional content of ritual to the extent that she has to remind herself to observe (1995:112). She recognizes that these experiences alter her and become part of her history, although not in the same way they do for the pilgrims themselves. Kenneth Liberman suggests that this is precisely what fieldworkers need to do: to "not make [our]selves immune to the effects of the insights and local practices that [we] are

investigating" (1999:56). Does allowing oneself to be profoundly moved and to experience a full range of emotional responses to religious phenomena create more honest fieldwork? Is the result an ever-shifting subjectivity that is difficult to manage when analyzing one's field notes?

Embodied Ideals

Reconciling myself to my personally ambivalent feelings and resisting conversion pressure were not the only difficulties I faced working in this community; I also found doing research on sacred people to be problematic. I realized early on that monastics endeavored to present ideal selves to me, selves that represented what Buddhist monastics are supposed to be like, rather than presenting more individualized selves. Their endeavors to appear moral and above reproach are a response to both old negative stereotypes against monastics and more recent scandals involving monastics in Taiwan (Crane, 2004). Their stories also conformed to specific formulae in order to be useful in teaching. They often answered questions, even simple biographic questions, in terms of dharma. For example, when asked how old she was, one nun answered in typical Chan riddle fashion: "From which life would you like me to begin counting?" I walked away from many of these encounters asking whether an answer given in terms of religious discourse, phrased in a way to try to persuade me (or the audience for my scholarship) that monastics were holy or teach me about the dharma was good field data. When trying to represent the demographics of the community I studied, what was I supposed to do with answers like "from which life would you like me to begin counting?" or personal histories that conformed to regular narrative themes?

One key means by which they would convert others, and one that worked quite successfully with their target audience, was to demonstrate the quality of life they experienced as monastics. Representing the ideal is required of them as members of the sangha, as the lay community takes refuge in them as teachers. Their job, essentially, is to be perfect and to no longer be individual. Their insistence on representing the ideal type was manifested in several ways in my research. The stories they told of who they had been before becoming monastics followed a small range of narrative paths, and it is reasonable to assume they selectively reinterpreted their personal histories to conform to the stories accepted at the temple. At my weaker moments, interviews with monastics frustrated me, as the monks and nuns seemed cagey and unwilling to break character to reveal their authentic, potentially flawed selves and individual histories. As an anthropologist trained to both observe and represent individual variation within a community, I worried that representing the homogeny they provided me with in my writings would leave my work open to criticism.

The monastics' concern with how they would be represented in my writings can be best illustrated with an example from the start of my field stay in Taiwan,

when I traveled to a number of Buddhist monasteries to attend retreats and find a place to settle in to conduct my field research. Although I was fairly certain I wanted to do my research in a Chan community, I also attended a retreat at a Pure Land temple. At the end of the retreat, several nuns told me that because I was a special American visitor, I would have the opportunity to meet with the Master. I hadn't asked for such a meeting, felt nervous at the prospect, and tried to get out of it. They told me it was an honor and that I absolutely must attend. In addition to myself, there would be two others asking questions of the Master, as well as two nuns who would be helping all of us with the procedures for addressing the Master—procedures which were quite elaborate at this temple, known for its strict adherence to traditional rules. Since both of the nuns had spent time in the United States and Canada, they would also serve as interpreters for me. Although my Mandarin was passable, the Master spoke with a heavy accent from the Anhui Province of China and was difficult to understand.

When the time came to see the Master, the other two women and I were led to a room and told to kneel on the floor, keeping our left sides toward the chair the Master would occupy when he entered the room. When he entered, we prostrated three times as directed, and spoke some lines the nuns prompted us to say. When it was their turn, each of the other women asked the Master if she could *chu jia*, leave home and become a nun in his community, and I realized that with this meeting I was being given an opportunity to ask to become a nun. I felt like I had been set up (I would have many similar opportunities in the future, and they all felt like set-ups), but I thought I could turn the situation around. I certainly did not want to become a nun, and I had decided on my second day of the retreat that this was not the temple where I wanted to conduct my research for a number of reasons. I decided that in case I later wanted to do a comparison of different temples or was refused at temples I was more interested in researching, I would ask if I could stay at this temple and do my research instead of asking to be allowed into his community as a monastic—almost certainly not the request they hoped I would make.

The Master seemed pleased with the idea, but had a number of questions to ask. He asked about my visa, and I explained that my granting agency provided one for a year. The Master looked pleased with this information, and then asked how good my Chinese reading skills were, as they would need to be quite good to read the sutras. I said they were fair, if limited, but that my research wasn't going to require reading. I explained that I didn't want to study Buddhism in books; as an anthropologist, I wanted to study how Buddhist monastics live.

When he'd finished listening to the translation of my explanation of the kind of research anthropologists do, the Master said a firm "no," and explained I couldn't do my research at his temple. If I'd wanted to study Buddhism, he said, he would have welcomed me, but I could not study the monks and nuns as people. He then explained why.

There are "Three Jewels" in Buddhism: the original teacher, the Buddha; the teachings of Buddhism, the dharma; and the ordained disciples, the sangha.

To doubt the truth or merit of any of the Three Jewels is bad karma. Despite being very well disciplined, he said, monastics remain human, and all human beings are flawed. If I were to record mistakes made by monastics in my scholarship, anyone who read about those mistakes may doubt the sangha and accrue bad karma. As the person who caused the reader to doubt the sangha, I would also accrue bad karma. To preserve my karma, therefore, he would not allow me to do my research at his temple. He wished me well, gave me permission to write about the week I'd spent at his temple, and invited me back to participate in other retreats should I wish to in the future.

I tell this story not only as an example of one of several occasions that I was offered an unwelcome opportunity to request to become a nun, but also because the Master's answer expressed the idea that to study monastics as people is problematic because they are holy. Although this problem was not articulated at other temples I visited or at the monastery where I eventually conducted the bulk of my research, belief in the danger of doubting the sangha likely influenced the answers monastics supplied to the questions I asked.

Ultimately, we work with what we are given, and often our field subjects know what we need better than we do. Not unlike Harding, who clearly finds a wealth of interesting ethnographic material in the witnessing discourse that her community presents her, examining the discourse surrounding the monastic ideal type and how those I lived with strove to conform to it was itself very interesting. The focus of my research shifted from trying to break through the barrier presented by their adhering to the monastic ideal to examining how they endeavored to meet that ideal. I found that what they offered was at least as compelling to research as what I originally thought I was going to research. I don't know, however, if they felt as though they got much back. I never did convert, although I did promise to tell others about them, and I have. I also said I may return with students some day who themselves might find the life appealing, and soon I will do that.

Inconclusive Conclusions

In the end I'm left with more questions than answers. How should fieldworkers researching missionizing communities present ourselves to the communities we study? Is the best fieldworker stance to be open to conversion or to know going in that we'll resist such pressures? Do we remain vague about our own beliefs? If so, and if those we research impose their own interpretations, reading our betwixt and between status as falling into a seeker role, do we resist that interpretation? If we accept it and try to work within it, or cannot dissuade them of it, how do we explain why we keep seeking but never find? When resisting conversion pressure, should we always be honest, to the extent that such is even possible? Finally, what should be our goal when researching religious personnel whose lives and stories are themselves sacred to the community we study? My own

attempts to engage with them as multifaceted, heterogeneous individuals may have been misdirected; they were certainly less effective than engaging with the ideal types they desired to present me with. Similarly, their attempts to draw me in as a convert or even as a nun were ineffective, although I did experience profoundly emotional reactions and feel I have a deeper understanding of both myself and the nature of compassion as a result of my meditation experiences. Also balancing between belief and disbelief, Edward Bruner describes his own fieldwork stance clearly when he says:

> My attitude, as an initiate and as an anthropologist, is to adopt a willing suspension of disbelief, to enter into other cultures and traditions, to open myself to new experiences and not to intellectualize. This is what I do initially, so that I may learn. Later on I write about the experience, analyze it, and may even become quite critical. In the beginning, however, I give myself to the encounter so that I can experience it more fully. (1996:307)

In his words, this approach seems quite sophisticated, but reflecting on my own fieldwork with the monastic community, I feel our strange dance of mutual pursuit and withdrawal, of revealing and hiding, of seeking and rejecting, seems to closely resemble flirting—an analogy that hints of deceit and caprice to a disquieting degree.

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