



Positionality and role-identity in a new religious context: Participant observation at Céu do Mapiá

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ABSTRACT

This article reflects upon the participant observational method in light of fieldwork undertaken in the Amazonian community of Mapiá. Mapiá is the spiritual headquarters of the largest branch of the Brazilian new religious movement of Santo Daime. Noting how my ritual participation gave rise to the ascription of a qualified insider identity, the following explores how variations in the identity ascribed to me (viz. 'provisional insider', 'potential real-insider' and 'counterfeit insider') refract variegated articulations of the Santo Daime worldview. Employing Patricia Hill Collins' notion of the 'outsider-within', I conclude by arguing that it is naive to see participant observation as a medium through which outsider status is straightforwardly transmuted to insider belonging. Rather, participant observation is best regarded as a methodological strategy for negotiating a complex spectrum of identities comprising any number of fluid and variegated subjectivities.

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Introduction

The following reflections centre upon the participant observational method and arise from fieldwork undertaken in the Amazonian community of Mapiá.¹ Mapiá village takes its name from a tributary which branches from the river Purus approximately half a day's journey by motorboat downriver from the Amazonian town of Boca do Acre. The nearest city is Rio Branco (eight hours in the dry season by car from Boca do Acre) and Mapiá itself is approximately half a day's journey (by river or dirt track) from the river Purus. Mapiá village has approximately 600 permanent residents whose numbers are intermittently swollen by the influx of national and international visitors during scheduled festival periods central to the ritual repertoire of the Santo Daime religion. Sited relative to its remote location, and regarded as the 'New Jerusalem', the settlement which eventually became the village of Mapiá was founded in the early 1980s by Sebastião Mota de Melo (1920–1990) and a vanguard of around 70 of his followers (Polari, 1999, p. 53). Known emically as *Céu do Mapiá* (Heaven of Mapiá), the village is the spiritual home of the, now international, organization of Cefluris (Eclectic Centre of the Universal Flowing Light Raimundo Irineu Serra). Cefluris is the largest branch of the Santo Daime religion and emerged in the early 1970s as a breakaway movement from the mother community of Alto Santo soon after the death of its leader, and founder of Santo Daime, Raimundo Irineu Serra (1892–1971). Today, the permanent population of Mapiá is made up of descendants of mixed-race and immigrant peasant communities and those from professional backgrounds who have relocated from the urban-industrial heartlands of Brazil.² Although Mapiá originally comprised only members of Santo Daime, intergenerational change and inward migration mean that this is no longer the case. Whilst the majority of the population technically belongs to Santo Daime, no more than forty-percent of permanent residents regularly participate in ritual events.

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¹ Fieldwork in Mapiá took place in the months of July and August of 2007 and was funded by the British Academy. Fieldwork at Mapiá was part of an ongoing program of participant observation in various communities belonging to the new religious movement of Santo Daime. Funded by the Global Exchange program of Chester University, Lancaster University, the British Academy, and the Leverhulme Trust, fieldwork commenced in 2005 and has, to date, involved six trips to Brazil in which over five months of research has been conducted with eleven communities located in seven different states of the country.

² Commonly termed *caboclos*, those of mixed-race and immigrant peasant origins descend from the miscegenation of Portuguese settlers and the indigenous communities of the Amazonian basin and those drawn to the region (principally from north-eastern Brazil) by the promise of employment generated by the rubber-booms of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. This latter group included both 'white' (*branco*) descendants of colonial settlement and Afro-Brazilians born of the racial mixing of indigenous, European, and African (ex-slave) heritages (Pace, 1997, pp. 81–89; Parker, 1985, pp. xvii–li).

Santo Daime is the most internationally widespread of Brazil's ayahuasca religions; the other two being Barquinha and the Vegetable Union. The word 'ayahuasca' derives from the Quechua for 'soul vine' or 'vine of the dead' and in the Brazilian context denotes the combination of the vine *Banisteriopsis caapi* and the leaves of the shrub *Psychotria viridis* (Dawson, 2007, p. 67). A psychotropic substance traditionally consumed by indigenous inhabitants of the Amazon, ayahuasca passed to non-indigenous peoples through its use among mixed-race communities and rubber-tappers in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Consumed in liquid form, ayahuasca ('Daime') is regarded by adherents of Santo Daime (known as *daimistas*) as an entheogen; that is, an agent whose properties facilitate the interaction of humankind with supernatural agents or forces. My visit to Mapiá forms part of a broader study of Cefluris which aims both to understand the gamut of micro, mid-range and macro-dynamics responsible for the emergence, spread (spatial and demographic) and consolidation of Santo Daime as an increasingly prominent member of the contemporary, non-mainstream religious spectrum. In addition to the project's interests in mid-range, organizational processes, its concerns with the micro-dynamics of, among other things, religious identity construction give a particular pertinence to the methodological approaches of participant observation.

Participant observation has long enjoyed an established place within the methodological tool kit of anthropological research (Bernard, 2005; Hammersley, 1992; Hume and Mulcock, 2004). Today, it continues to grow in popularity as a mode of qualitative data capture used by other empirically-oriented disciplines — not least social science (Kunda, 2006; Wacquant, 2003) and religious studies (Arweck and Stringer, 2002). Participant observation raises many issues (e.g. confidentiality, trust, identity, vulnerability, risk, reflexivity) which resonate with the theoretical framing, moral safeguarding and methodological execution of empirical research as a whole (Adler and Adler, 1987; Jackson, 1983, pp. 39–46). Consequently, participant observation remains central to both postgraduate training programs and disciplinary debates in respect of cognate applied methods and their respective strengths and weaknesses. As teacher, supervisor and fieldworker, I am constantly discussing the whys and wherefores of participant observation and find myself often coming up against a view of participant observation which regards it as a relatively straightforward and unproblematical way of transiting from *de facto* outsider to full-blown insider-identity status. In what follows I hope to indicate that there is very rarely, if ever, a straightforwardly one-dimensional outsider – insider spectrum across which participant observation enables the researcher to move. In so doing, this paper represents a form of case-study analysis which both rationalizes (and thereby role-models) its use of participant observation and explicates its utility as a methodological strategy for navigating a multi-dimensional field of fluid and variegated identities.

The recognition of participant observation as a mode of navigation is in part inspired by ongoing academic discussions of 'positionality'. According to Chacko, positionality

refers to aspects of identity in terms of race, class, gender, caste, sexuality and other attributes that are markers of *relational* positions in society, rather than intrinsic qualities ... The process of negotiating these identities, while inherent in fieldwork, is challenging ... Moreover, due to its relativity, positionality is contingent and contested. Conflicts that stem from positionality could result in apprehension about both the disclosure of personal information and the politics of representation of the Other, unequal relations of power and possible exploitation, and even lead to ethical problems for the researcher. (2004, p. 52)

A well-established concept in feminist research (e.g. England, 1994, pp. 80–89; Plowman, 1995, pp. 19–21), positionality has come to be increasingly used as a means of exploring the variegated nature of the interaction which occurs during fieldwork between the researcher and the researched (e.g. Jackson, 1983, pp. 39–46; Sultana, 2007, pp. 304–318; Merriam et al., 2001, pp. 405–416; Rocha, 2008). Expressing, among other things, the variability of fieldwork experiences, the notion of positionality points up the often unpredictable nature of the interface between researcher identity and the, always multifaceted, research environment. As evidenced by the following, the employment of participant observational methods is contingent upon a range of factors – some *imported* by the researcher and others *inherent* to the field – which interact to position the fieldworker in sometimes unexpected ways.

Methodological considerations

According to Bositis 'there may be no type of research design more complex, and therefore more misunderstood, than participant observation' (1988, p. 333). The complexity of participant observation in respect of research design is, in large measure, generated by the fact that it is actually a 'shorthand term for a set of methods' (e.g. ritual participation, interviewing, experimental stimulation) whose potential interaction needs to be carefully assessed prior to their employment in the field (Whyte, 1979, p. 56). At the same time, the intersubjective dimensions of participant observation make for a somewhat complex application. In addition to dealing with the demands of the particular 'role' assumed in the field, the participant observer must also manage the wide variety of practical, emotional and intellectual challenges provoked by a range of (often unpredictable) interpersonal encounters. Writing of his 'efforts to create rapport' with the fundamentalist Christians among whom he was (overtly) working, for example, Peshkin bemoans 'the calculated use of masks and roles [integral to] ... the mask-stripping dimension' of participant observation. Remarking that 'I donned masks in order to remove the masks of those I wanted to observe', Peshkin regards the kind of role management central to participant observation as a form of 'deception' which, no matter how justified, generates 'differential burdens of guilt and anxiety' on the part of the researcher (1984, p. 258).³ It is upon my role as a participant observer at Céu do Mapiá that the following material reflects.

It is commonplace in writing upon participant observation to find idealized typologies of the differing roles which might be assumed by the researcher when undertaking fieldwork (e.g. Adler and Adler, 1987; Bositis, 1988, p. 340; Gans, 1982, pp. 53–61; Robson, 2002, pp. 316–19). Following Junker's (1952) lead, Gold (1958) offers what has become for many the archetypal classification of participant observational roles. Categorized relative to the extent of participation allowed and the formality of observational techniques employed, Gold's typology comprises the roles of 'complete participant', 'participant-as-observer', 'observer-as-participant', and 'complete observer' (1958, pp. 217–23). Covert in nature, the role of 'complete participant' facilitates the greatest degree of participation whilst involving the least formal (and thereby most

³ Whilst the unremittingly reflexive nature of participant observation inevitably involves a degree of role management beyond that of the day-to-day, Goffman's (1974) work on the subjective dynamics of 'frame alignment' and 'impression management', for example, underlines the strategic nature of many interpersonal encounters, no matter how seemingly informal.

unstructured) observational techniques. As one would expect, because it stands at the opposite end of the typological spectrum, the role of 'complete observer' (which can be covert or overt) combines minimal participation with maximal observation. In between these two ideal extremes, the role of 'participant-as-observer' is differentiated from that of the 'complete participant' only by virtue of it being overt in nature. To this extent, the 'participant-as-observer' focuses principally upon the act of participation and thereby employs few, if any, formal investigative techniques. Whilst the role of 'observer-as-participant' involves a degree of participation, it concentrates chiefly upon the acquisition of data through structured means. Unavoidably formal by nature, and thereby generating less rapport than the 'participant-as-observer' role, the methodological structure afforded by the role of 'observer-as-participant' furnishes a greater degree of operational control which, in theory, enhances reliability and validity.

Although ideal in nature, each of Gold's types constitutes a 'master role' which, in part, determines the nature of and manner in which any number of 'lesser role-relationships' might be developed (i.e. 'achieved' or 'ascribed') in the field (1958, p. 219). In assuming one or other of these roles in any given context, the fieldworker opens up the possibility of developing certain kinds of 'lesser role-relationships' (e.g. as friend, colleague or employee) whilst closing off the development of others. The covert master role of complete participant, for example, would be expected to develop different types (in kind and degree) of lesser role-relationships in the same fieldwork context than that fostered by an overt master role such as observer-as-participant. At the same time, and excluding the role of complete participant, the adoption of a particular mode of participant observation does not preclude the possibility of assuming one or other master roles within the same fieldwork context. As Gans notes when discussing his threefold typology of 'total participant', 'researcher-participant' and 'total researcher', such is the variety of data-gathering techniques employed by participant observation that any one project is likely to involve the researcher moving between a number of roles relative to the context at hand (1982, pp. 53–61). Owing to the lesser role-relationships which the interface of master role and fieldwork context inevitably generates, the fieldworker's movement between master roles is not always as straightforward as one might initially expect. Certainly, my own experience in the field has taught me that lesser role-relationships developed in relation to the participant-as-observer role, for example, frequently require recalibrating subsequent to my shifting to the master role of observer-as-participant. Although informants are fully cognizant of my status as a participant observer, the increased methodological formality involved in the transition from participant-as-observer (e.g. ritual co-participant) to observer-as-participant (e.g. interviewer) invariably involves an element of renegotiation as both parties strive to translate the dynamics established in one role-relationship to the other. In effect, movement between modes of participant observation embroils both fieldworker and informants in shifting roles.

It is, perhaps, the greater latitude afforded the development of lesser role-relationships which makes the covert master role of complete participant such an attractive *prima facie* prospect. As indicated by the professional guidelines of organizations such as the American Sociological Association, British Sociological Association and the Social Research Association, however, the covert nature of complete participation is methodologically contentious and its employment justifiable only in exceptional cases.⁴ Given that my research with Santo Daime warrants no exceptional measures, I elected not to employ the role of complete participant for my visit to Céu do Mapiá. Conversely, the detached nature of the master role of complete observer inhibits the development of all but the most superficial lesser role-relationships. As a result, adoption of the role of complete observer was ruled out on account of its lack of rapport-building potential and subsequent inability to furnish the kind of subjective (i.e. hermeneutical/interpretative) data necessary to understanding many of the micro and mid-range dynamics in which my research is interested.

Whilst the role of observer-as-participant has neither the methodological objections of the complete participant nor the dearth of rapport-building potential of the complete observer, its adoption as my principal mode of participant observation was rejected on contextual grounds. Just as different types of master role influence the kind of lesser role-relationships developed in the field, so too do the differing contexts (e.g. school, gang, internet chat-room) within which assumed master roles are operationalized. In effect, every context plays a part in determining both the efficacy of any particular master role and the specific characteristics of the lesser role-relationships developed in connection with it. Consequently, dynamics native to the fieldwork context should, as far as one is able, be taken into account when considering which particular master role to adopt as one's principal *modus operandi*.

As the spiritual headquarters of the Santo Daime religion, the context of Céu do Mapiá is scored markedly by its practical and conceptual repertoires. Santo Daime is a highly ritualized religion, employs a sectarian worldview and is self-consciously collectivistic in ethos. In combination, these dynamics result in the valorization of ritual participation as both the definitive marker of insider – outsider status and the principal means to overcoming spiritual ignorance. The centrality of ritual participation at Céu do Mapiá is reinforced discursively by the designation of rituals as 'trials' (*provas*) through which the spiritual merits of participants are tested relative to their moral fortitude and physical perseverance. As with Santo Daime as a whole, the ritual repertoire of Céu do Mapiá is an amalgam of popular Catholic, esoteric, indigenous, Spiritist, Afro-Brazilian, and new age beliefs and practices. The five most important rituals are those of the *feitio* (where Daime is made), *bailado* (dance), *concentração* (concentration), *cura* (cure), and *missa* (mass). During these rituals participants ('regimented' relative to sex, age, marital status, seniority, and height⁵) face inward towards a central, star-shaped, table which is commonly laid with a wooden two-spurred cross (*cruzeiro*) draped by a rosary, statuettes of Mary and Jesus, photographs of the movement's significant figures, candles, flowers, water, and incense sticks. (Some *daimista* groups also include statuettes of Catholic saints and a Bible, whilst others might also have crystals, representations of Afro-Brazilian spirits and deities, and oriental icons.) Once tied to the lunar cycle, the *feitio* is now conducted whenever fresh supplies of 'Daime' are needed. The working day of the *feitio* commences soon after dawn and finishes around 4.30pm. During my time at Mapiá, the *feitio* continued for well over a week. Both 'dance' and 'concentration' take place in the church (*igreja*) and commence after sunset. The former ritual is performed whilst standing and can last anything up to fourteen hours, whilst the latter is mostly undertaken sitting down and does not normally exceed five hours. The two scheduled rituals of 'cure' (*Mesa Branca* and *São Miguel*) likewise

⁴ The argument against covert participant observation rests principally upon its contravention of the ethical principle of 'informed consent' (e.g. <http://www.asanet.org/>; <http://www.britsoc.co.uk/>; <http://www.the-sra.org.uk/>). Other problems with complete participation include, for example, the dangers of over-rapport (e.g. 'going native', Adler and Adler, 1987, pp. 17–19; Jarvie, 1969, pp. 505–508) and its impact upon the epistemological status of the data gathered and the practical implications of the exertion and convolutions often involved in preserving the researcher's covert status.

⁵ For the martial overtones of this regimentation, see Dawson, 2008, pp. 183–95.

take place in the church and commence after dark. Lasting between five and six hours, these rituals include acts of mediumistic possession. The 'mass' is celebrated in the cemetery and occurs late in the afternoon of the first Monday of each month and on the anniversaries of the death of prominent members. Excluding the early evening ritual of *oração* (prayer), Daime is consumed at these and the vast majority of celebrations (some regular others intermittent) which populate the ritual calendar of Céu do Mapiá. Although who does and does not attend rituals is often the subject of private conversations among members, the importance of ritual participation is formally underlined by the monitoring of certain rituals with those in attendance signing a record book.

Indicative of the meritocratic influences of popular Catholic religiosity, the demanding, if not arduous, nature of *daimista* rituals (known also as 'works') is understood to underwrite their spiritual efficacy. On the one hand, and in addition to the physical demands of prolonged ritual activity, individual participants are charged with 'staying firm' (*ficar firme*) in the face of the psychosomatic challenges of working in the astral plane whilst under the narcotic influences of Daime. On the other hand, and whilst managing these individual challenges, participants are required to engage in strictly regimented collective activity such as hymn singing, dancing and prayer.⁶ Catalyzed by the consumption of Daime, and generated by the combination of individual discipline and corporate harmony, astral forces are said to be channeled by ritual action to the end of forming a 'spiritual current' through which participants are bound vertically with the astral plane and horizontally with each other. Such is the importance that Santo Daime places upon the relationship between individual discipline and collective responsibility that the role of complete observer at ritual events is excluded except in the most exceptional of circumstances.⁷ Attendance at ritual events is held by *daimistas* to signal an acceptance of one's corporate obligations in respect of making a personal contribution to the collective generation of the spiritual current. As the discursive repertoire of Santo Daime leaves no room for ritual bystanders, one has to participate in order to observe. Consequently, the consumption of Daime (the *sine qua non* of ritual participation) and the managing of its attendant psychophysical effects assume a methodological significance alongside the more generic considerations under discussion throughout this paper.⁸

The valorization of ritual participation within the *daimista* worldview entails individual involvement in ritual activity being regarded as both an immense privilege (by virtue of the spiritual possibilities opened up) and an onerous responsibility (in view of the collective implications of individual ill-discipline). On at least two counts, then, the adoption of the observer-as-participant role as my primary mode of participant observation at Céu do Mapiá would have been found wanting. First, by failing to reflect the overwhelming importance of ritual participation to the *daimista* worldview, the prioritization of observation over participation concomitant with this master role would have hindered my ability to nurture the depth of critical empathy necessary to understanding (as much as possible) the experiential-symbolic universe of those at Céu do Mapiá. Second, but no less important, failure to prioritize ritual participation may well have resulted, at best, in my labeling as half-hearted and disinterested or, at worst, in my ready dismissal as an unabashed outsider. Whether treated with indifference or rejected outright, either response would have resulted in me being regarded as unworthy of the time and attention necessary to building any meaningful degree of rapport with potential informants. Having ruled out the employment of observer-as-participant role as my primary mode of participant observation, and in view of the aforementioned valorization of ritual participation, the role of participant-as-observer was adopted as the principal means of undertaking fieldwork with the Santo Daime community of Céu do Mapiá.

Participant observation in context

In addition to undermining the case for adopting the role of observer-as-participant as the primary mode of participant observation, the collective expectations which Céu do Mapiá has of the ritual participant also impacted upon the manner in which the primary role of participant-as-observer was operationalized. Concomitant with its exclusion of the role of 'ritual bystander', the *daimista* worldview precludes recognition of the active presence of a *complete outsider* within ritual space. So fundamental is the conceptual linkage of individual participation and collective responsibility that the act of ritual participation results in the participant being ascribed a form of qualified insider status. Consequently and irrespective of my self-declared status as an academic researcher my participation in ritual events entailed the ascription of an, albeit qualified, insider identity which, as will be seen below, influenced my positionality in the field in a variety of ways.

When first conducting fieldwork with Santo Daime groups the ascription of insider status arising from ritual participation took me somewhat by surprise. Although limited to secondary research, my initial appreciation of Santo Daime's valorization of ritual activity was sufficiently informed to allow the identification of ritual participation as a key means of establishing rapport with would-be informants. Writing about 'social contexts where the members defining them are normally suspicious of outsiders', Bositis remarks that

Circumstances such as these require a novice to establish 'membership credentials' of sorts ... This credentialing process requires the new entrant to show some measure of like-mindedness with the group's members. (1988, p. 338)

Although intending to demonstrate open-mindedness rather than 'like-mindedness', the centrality of ritual activity to the *daimista* worldview provided what I initially took to be a ready-made 'credentialing process' through which I might establish my status as an empathetic outsider. Upon commencing fieldwork (and thereby ritual participation), however, it was not long before my anticipated role of empathetic outsider was unilaterally reconfigured through members' refusals to regard me as anything other than an, albeit qualified, insider. As one community leader put it, 'you're one of us now'. Such were the (unanticipated) implications of my ritual participation that prior expectations in respect of researcher – researched relations were soon shown to be wide of the mark.

Reflecting upon its implications for participant observation, Sherif notes that understanding of the 'boundaries between researchers and the "researched"' has undergone widespread change over the course of 'the last several decades'. Arising from such developments, it is

⁶ 'Inspectors' (*fiscais*) patrol the ritual space to ensure that individual and collective discipline (e.g. corporal protocols and hierarchical order) are maintained.

⁷ The only example I can think of here is the voluntary non-participation of the occasional member of the numerous teams of experts (e.g. legal, medical, anthropological) commissioned by a variety of Brazilian governments to investigate matters pertaining to the legal status of the ritual consumption of ayahuasca.

⁸ Shanon (2002) offers a detailed 'cognitive psychological' phenomenology of ayahuasca-induced experiences in various religious contexts in Brazil.

argued, ‘fixed’ and ‘oppositional’ readings of insider – outsider roles must give way to more nuanced interpretations which acknowledge ‘that boundaries are blurred with shifting and ambiguous identities’ (2001, p. 446).⁹ Acknowledging her experiences as a ‘native’ anthropologist, Narayan likewise critiques the ‘essentializing’ nature of ‘insider/outsider or observer/observed’ dichotomies. Seeking to move beyond such oppositional labels, Narayan proposes that

at this historical moment we might more profitably view each anthropologist in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations. The loci along which we are aligned with or set apart from those whom we study are multiple and in flux. Factors such as education, gender, sexual orientation, class, or sheer duration of contacts may at different times outweigh the cultural identity we associate with insider or outsider status. (Narayan, 1993, pp. 671–2)

The problematization of insider – outsider dynamics undermines previously naive (if not disingenuous) understandings of participant observation as facilitating the purportedly straightforward transition from outsider to insider status. Just as outsider – insider identities are neither as fixed nor as binary as once thought, so too is the range and mutability of these identities far greater than previously acknowledged. Far from being a medium through which outsider status is straightforwardly transmuted to insider belonging, participant observation is best regarded as a methodological strategy for negotiating a complex spectrum of identities comprising any number of fluid and variegated subjectivities ranging from the *de facto* outsider to the *de iure* insider.

The success of ritual participation as a credentialing strategy was discursively confirmed at Céu do Mapiá during a conversation involving a mixed party of permanent residents and recently-arrived international visitors. Provoked by my introduction as a participant observer to those just arrived, one international visitor who leads a Santo Daime church (*igreja*) in Europe responded by recounting an episode in which s/he was approached by a group of journalists wanting to film a *daimista* ceremony but who were unwilling to participate in proceedings. Having indicated that the non-participatory conditions attached to the request made it impossible to grant, s/he then turned to me and said ‘but you, you are willing to participate in our rituals and that is good, it shows real commitment, real openness’. Although some in the same party of international visitors viewed my role as academic researcher in a somewhat different light, as will be seen below, even these individuals acknowledged, however begrudgingly, the status-generating implications of my ritual participation. The dynamic nature of insider – outsider identities, coupled with prior experience of participant observation at other *daimista* sites, led me to expect that the insider status granted by virtue of my ritual activity at Céu do Mapiá would be neither fixed nor unqualified. I was not mistaken.

Ascribed insider identities

In what follows I highlight the three most influential insider identities ascribed to me in addition to discussing their implications for the operationalization of my role as participant observer. In so doing, I employ the hermeneutical trope of the ‘ideal type’. Established by Weber as a key tool of social-scientific analytical description, ideal typing relies both upon the bracketing out or elision of some characteristics and the ‘one-sided accentuation’ of others (Weber, 1949, p. 89). Inevitably, then, ideal types never fit completely the empirical terrain they seek map and, as a result of what they seek to achieve, can sometimes appear static. Here, sadly, we reach the limits of analytical description. Although ideal in nature, and thereby static by way of their analytical description of otherwise fluid empirical dynamics, each of the three insider identities to be discussed accurately summarizes a range of often discrete lesser role-relationships whose characteristics bear sufficient similarity to warrant their inclusion within their respective typological category. In no particular order of priority, the three ascribed identities arising from my ritual participation were those of ‘provisional insider’, ‘potential real-insider’ and ‘counterfeit insider’. As will be seen, the ascribed identity of ‘provisional insider’ reflects an assured acceptance of the bounded nature of my participant observation at Céu do Mapiá. Whilst no less accepting of my qualified insider status, those ascribing a ‘potential real-insider’ identity were somewhat less comfortable with the bounded nature of my participant observation; the restricted extent of which was seen to raise a number of problematical questions. In contrast with these two ascribed identities, that of ‘counterfeit insider’ reflects an explicit discomfort on the part of some with the qualified insider status arising from my ritual participation.

Provisional insider

The ascribed identity of ‘provisional insider’ articulates best the vast majority of my relationships with the long-term, permanent residents of Céu do Mapiá. In respect of the leadership of Céu do Mapiá, they are well aware of the strategic value of favorable academic opinion and are not wholly unused to receiving (usually Brazilian) professionals with interests in assorted aspects of the social-cultural life of their community (e.g. Groisman, 1999; Schmidt, 2007). Having clarified my intentions and vetted my academic credentials before allowing my visit, community leaders were further reassured upon my arrival by my willingness to participate fully in Céu do Mapiá’s extensive ritual repertoire. As for other members of the fixed population, Céu do Mapiá’s longstanding presence on the ‘ayahuasca trail’ ensures a steady trickle of international visitors whose established presence has rendered them somewhat blasé to transient participants such as me. When I identified myself as an academic, however, my reception was nearly always cordial and at times indicated that some were actually flattered by my interest. As with the leadership, my active presence at ritual events played a significant part in establishing my credentials with inhabitants of Mapiá as someone worthy of their time and attention. Consequent upon my ritual participation and qualified by my transient status, the insider identity ascribed by leaders and membership alike was at all times provisional in nature. As such, the provisionality of my ascribed insider status inevitably influenced the kind of rapport and degree of intimacy fostered with potential informants. Nevertheless, for the majority at Céu do Mapiá my provisional insider identity remained relatively unproblematic and thereby served as the basis upon which a sufficient degree of rapport was built to enable the acquisition of qualitatively meaningful data.

⁹ The fieldwork implications of this insight are variously developed by postcolonial approaches, feminist critiques, and action researchers (e.g., Bayly, 2007; Faubion and Marcus, 2009; Naples, 2003).

Potential real-insider

As indicated above, the ascription of provisional insider status was neither universal in scope nor exclusive in application. In terms of its non-universality, for some at Mapiá the qualified insider status arising from my ritual participation was a cause of obvious discomfort. The discomfort of these individuals will be discussed below in relation to their preferred ascription of what may be termed a 'counterfeit insider' identity. In respect of its non-exclusive character, I encountered at Céu do Mapiá a number who whilst acknowledging the provisionality of my insider identity nevertheless ascribed what might best be labeled a 'potential real-insider' identity. The dynamics involved in my ascription as a potential real-insider emerged directly from particular interpretations of the spiritual implications of my ritual participation. Although recognizing both the validity of my provisional insider status and its time-bound nature (i.e. that it would expire upon my departure from Céu do Mapiá), those ascribing a potential real-insider identity did so on the grounds that my ritual participation made me a likely candidate for conversion. My identification as a likely convert was not solely founded on the belief that my willingness to engage in ritual activity evinced either a thirst for enlightenment or openness to the *daimista* worldview. Rather, the ascription of a potential real-insider identity emerged principally from the belief that ritual activity exposes the participant to the spiritual force of Daime. By virtue of the 'sacred drink' (*bebida sagrada*) consumed and the spiritual current generated, *daimista* rituals make a potential convert of every cultic participant. For example, a common practice encountered since my earliest encounters with the *daimista* movement involves the amount of Daime served to me at ritual events. At every ritual in which Daime is served ('dispatched'), the drink is consumed at the outset and at regular intervals throughout ceremonial proceedings. Whilst the amount of liquid dispatched to each person can vary relative to age, sex and experience the average dose of Daime dispatched at Céu do Mapiá hovers around two fluid ounces. A number of times when receiving my dose of Daime from certain individuals, however, I noticed that the amount served to me was larger (sometimes markedly so) than those dispatched to established members with whom I was queuing. Upon asking those responsible at a later date, in addition to a knowing smile the response given usually revolved around their desire for me 'to know' or 'be met by' the power of Daime. Two other dynamics relating to the ascription of a potential real-insider identity are also worthy of note.

The first of these dynamics manifested itself at times when I wanted to conduct interviews and thereby needed to shift from the master role of participant-as-observer to that of observer-as-participant. Whilst the increased formality involved in this shift of master roles frequently required a recalibration of the relational dynamics established between myself and those at Céu do Mapiá, the nature of this recalibration differed markedly between those who regarded my status as straightforwardly provisional and those who viewed it as precedent to a substantively more meaningful (i.e. 'real') insider identity. Aside from a little uncertainty and initial constraint, those ascribing an unqualified provisional insider identity had no trouble managing the change in relational dynamics provoked by my shift from ritual co-participant to academic interviewer. In contrast, however, those ascribing a potential real-insider identity exhibited a greater degree of discomfort in either accepting or coping with the modified relational dynamics involved in my change of master roles. Comfortable with participating alongside me in ritual events or talking informally about Daime and their relationship with it, when asked for an interview these individuals either refused my request or employed response strategies which resisted my questions and provided little beyond the superficial. Struck at the time by the reflexive (i.e. self-aware) nature of these response modes, subsequent reflection leads me to conclude that the resistance offered was directly related to respondent discomfort with my adoption of a more formal, and thereby seemingly detached, participant observational role. Indicative of the reduced intimacy implicated in formal investigative techniques, my adoption of the role of interviewer reasserted my status as a visiting academic which, in turn, underlined the provisional nature of my involvement with Santo Daime. By relativising their ascription of me as a potential real-insider the shift from a participatory to an observationally orientated master role directly undermined aspirations in respect of my potential for conversion. Whilst other factors may well have been at play here, resistance to my shift from participant-as-observer to observer-as-participant clearly represented for some an attempt to prevent the erosion of my ascribed status as a potential real-insider.¹⁰

The second dynamic connected with my ascription as a potential real-insider involved my labeling by some as spiritually unworthy. A question which functions commonly as an initial greeting at Céu do Mapiá enquires after one's status as a member of Santo Daime by asking 'are you uniformed?' (*é fardado?*). The use of uniforms as significations of membership is common to all of Brazil's ayahuasca religions (Dawson, 2007, pp. 67–98). In the case of Santo Daime, the kinds of uniform used have their origins in the festival dress of Catholic popular culture but also reflect European esoteric influences and their penchant for hierarchy and demarcating insider – outsider boundaries. Individuals are eligible to become a *fardado* subsequent to participating in three official *daimista* rituals. Once *fardado*, members assume a range of obligations chief among which is ritual participation especially at official festivals and celebrations. Neglect of these obligations results in the loss of *fardado* status. Although my ritual involvement to date makes me eligible to be *fardado*, and aware that a number of Brazilian academics studying Santo Daime have done so, I have chosen not to adopt the *daimista* uniform.

When discussing my decision not to become a *fardado* with those ascribing a provisional insider identity, although a degree of puzzlement was sometimes expressed conversations usually ended with a shrug of the shoulders and remarks along the lines of 'it's your choice'. Among those ascribing a potential real-insider identity, however, a number of conversations took a different turn as I was pressed much harder about my decision not to be *fardado*. Although the contours of these discussions varied relative to those involved, all had the same tenor as those with whom I was talking replied to my reasoning with skeptical looks and furrowed brows before intimating that I was resisting Daime or concluding that Daime had not called me to be *fardado*. Whether intransigence on my part or rejection on the part of Daime, the failure of my sustained ritual participation to result in me becoming *fardado* was taken as clear indication of a lack of spiritual worthiness on my part. As one *daimista* put it, 'if Daime hasn't called you by now, you're never going to be called'. Among the hermeneutical options furnished by the *daimista* worldview, the accusation of spiritual unworthiness on my part could be predicated on the grounds of moral inertia born of the overwhelming weight of bad karma inherited from past incarnations and/or attributed to the recalcitrant bloody-mindedness of one destined never to be enlightened. Either way, those ascribing a potential real-insider identity were able to relativise the potentially counter-validating nature of my non-conversion by laying the blame for my failure to become a *fardado* squarely at my door. Both

¹⁰ Resistance to role-shift may be informed by a number of factors; not least, concern with academic misrepresentation, straightforward shyness, a wish not to externalize otherwise intimate or untranslatable experiences, and resistance to outsider appropriation of insider knowledge and practice.

metaphysical and moral, the spiritual unworthiness responsible for the non-actualization of my potential real-insider status ensured that the power of Daime remained undiminished and the implications of ritual participation unchallenged.

Counterfeit insider

The third ascribed identity treated here is that of 'counterfeit insider'. Those treating my insider identity as counterfeit were usually visitors to Céu do Mapiá or were individuals who, though now full-time residents, had relocated to the community sometime prior. From working alongside, chatting informally with or hearing about these individuals, I discovered that all of those ascribing me with a counterfeit insider identity had personal biographies marked by previous transit between various non-mainstream religiosities and alternative spiritualities. Although almost never blatantly rude, the refusal of these *fardados* to countenance any form of cooperation with my research was tinged with an undisguised element of discomfort in respect of my presence at Céu do Mapiá. Over a group breakfast on the morning after a work, for example, and in response to an enquiry from a fellow diner, I was explaining why I participated in *daimista* rituals when someone else at the table interrupted my explanation which, to that point, had involved me saying that I participated in order 'to observe, learn and understand' ('*pra' observar, aprender e compreender*'). Refusing to address me in Portuguese (which everyone had been using up until this point), my newfound (European) interlocutor gesticulated dramatically to those around the table and asked me in English, 'please, tell us, just what is it that you have *learned*?' Whilst not quite a sneer, the emphasis he placed on this word was clearly intended to demonstrate unhappiness at what he regarded as a futile attempt by one such as me to learn and understand. Visibly discomforted by the vehemence of this interjection, my interrogator's companions (again speaking in Portuguese) rephrased the question in a non-adversarial manner and thereby allowed me to pick up where my original explanation had been interrupted.

Among the visitors to Céu do Mapiá a degree of this discomfort was connected with idealized expectations of what is for them the spiritual heart of Santo Daime. For these individuals the community of Céu do Mapiá symbolizes a religious and environmental idyll whose spiritual and ecological purity sets it apart from the world at large. Interpreted through a worldview infused by millenarian motifs, Mapiá has long been regarded as both the 'New Jerusalem' at which the spiritual rebirth of humankind will be effected and a 'Noah's Ark' in which the deluge of forthcoming global calamities will be ridden out in relative safety (Dawson, 2008, pp. 183–95). Both the increasing numbers of non-*daimistas* at the village of Mapiá and the recent arrival of the motorcar, however, have combined to reconfigure emic signifiers such as 'New Jerusalem' and 'Noah's Ark'. At the same time, these developments rapidly erode the idealized expectations with which many visitors arrive in respect of the mother community's spiritual, environmental and demographic purity. The resentment generated for some by the inevitable disavowal of idealized expectations of Mapiá provides a partial backdrop to my rejection as a counterfeit insider. Like the motorcar and the non-*daimista* resident of Mapiá, my presence as a participant observer was seen by some as sullyng an otherwise pristine environment. Consequently, and irrespective of my full ritual involvement, the suspension of idealized belief signified by my presence at Mapiá contributed to the ascription of a counterfeit insider identity whose status was as real yet as bogus as the presence of both motorcar and non-*daimista* resident.

A further dynamic informing the ascription of a counterfeit insider identity has its roots in particular appropriations of sectarian strands of the *daimista* worldview. The form of sectarianism at play in Céu do Mapiá draws elements principally from popular Catholic millenarianism and traditional esoteric paradigms. Discursively, for example, these elements combine to situate the Santo Daime community and its members (understood as 'soldiers') in the midst of the cosmic battle between good and evil. In practical terms their combination results, among other things, in the careful management of both insider – outsider boundaries and ongoing membership status. Although the sectarian dynamics of the *daimista* worldview infuse it with a well established countercultural ethos, this ethos is by no means evenly articulated across the Santo Daime community. For the majority of those I engaged at Céu do Mapiá, the countercultural implications of the *daimista* worldview express themselves diffusely through a negative evaluation of society at large (as corrupt, decadent, secular, materialistic, etc.) and a positive evaluation of their own community as both an oasis of spiritual enlightenment and historically privileged by way of its status as midwife of the new era. At the same time, however, this view precludes neither the belief that there are good (albeit spiritually unenlightened) people beyond the confines of the *daimista* community nor the desire to see society at large transformed for the better through, among other things, the wholesale adoption of *daimista* beliefs and practices. Prevalent at Céu do Mapiá this form of sectarianism combined with aforementioned dynamics to facilitate my ascription with both provisional insider and potential real-insider identities.

Although the prevailing representation I encountered at Céu do Mapiá, this particular articulation of *daimista* counterculturalism was not the only one at play and certainly not the one espoused by those ascribing a counterfeit insider identity. For those ascribing a counterfeit insider identity, the articulation of Santo Daime's sectarian ethos comprises what might best be described as a militant counterculturalism. Involvement with Santo Daime represents for these individuals the latest installment in the formation of a counter-cultural religious identity which has been reflexively nurtured through many years of transit via an assorted number of non-mainstream religions and alternative spiritualities. Whilst not the only component of the *daimista* repertoire responsible for drawing these individuals to the movement, the prevalence of sectarian themes provides a significant attraction by dint of re-affirming the self-consciously oppositional nature of their counter-cultural religious identity. Unlike the more diffuse forms found at Céu do Mapiá, however, the binary oppositions (e.g. insider – outsider, church–world, light–dark) afforded by sectarian repertorial motifs are read in bald confrontational fashion. The belief that there are good people beyond the boundaries of Santo Daime is rejected as is the desire to see society transformed through its adoption of *daimista* beliefs and practices. What matters to these individuals is not simply that Santo Daime and its members are different from the world at large but that they remain different. Counterculturalism, then, is not a temporary position provisional upon society's failure (to date) to adopt the *daimista* way of life. Rather, counterculturalism is for these individuals a dogmatic stance born of the unqualified rejection of society as irrevocably corrupt.¹¹

To some extent, those regarding my ascribed insider identity as counterfeit in nature did so on the grounds of perceived injustice born of sustained misrepresentation of their countercultural lifestyles by an ostensibly secular and positivistic academic community. Unencumbered with strategic interests in my potential utility as a sympathetic voice to the outside world, those ascribing a counterfeit insider identity were

¹¹ In this instance, then, and somewhat ironically, both theoretical disavowals of and methodological attempts to circumvent hard and fast 'insider – outsider' distinctions run contrary to, yet implicitly reinforce (given their negation of), existing dichotomous worldviews.

free to dismiss my academic status with the same disregard with which they viewed secular mainstream culture and its purportedly hostile professional functionaries. As a certified representative of mainstream culture, I was clearly being perceived as an enemy within the gates.

There is, however, another aspect of my perceived representation of mainstream culture at play here. For, the ascription of a counterfeit insider identity also reflects a deep-seated unease for some at what the presence of a mainstream representative at Céu do Mapiá signifies for the countercultural status of their *daimista* identity. In effect, my academic enquiries were rebuffed not simply because I represent the mainstream, but because my presence symbolized, in part, the mainstreaming of the Santo Daime religion. For these individuals, adherence to Santo Daime reflects a longstanding counterculturalism in which conversion to this new religious identity as much signifies the rejection of mainstream society as it does the acceptance of the *daimista* worldview. Consequently any erosion of Santo Daime's currently marginal social standing is likewise perceived as an erosion of its countercultural status. It is no coincidence, then, that those ascribing a counterfeit insider identity are distinctly ambivalent in respect of Santo Daime's evangelistic aspirations. Freedom from interference in practicing their faith is what they seek, not the widespread acceptance of the *daimista* worldview. Perceived as blurring the boundaries between the *daimista* community and the world at large, to some my ascription as a qualified insider signaled an incremental shift in Santo Daime's status to a less marginal condition *vis-à-vis* mainstream culture. Faced with the partial mainstreaming of their religious community, the response of these individuals was to negate the perceived erosion of their countercultural identity by regarding my qualified insider identity as being counterfeit in nature. Real by virtue of my ritual participation, the ascription of a qualified insider identity was nevertheless rendered bogus on account of my mainstream credentials.

Conclusion

Borrowing a term from Patricia Hill Collins, the participant observer might be described as an 'outsider-within'. For Collins, the term 'outsider-within' captures the variegated identity dynamics and assorted power relations which combine to position black women at the margins of the domestic, academic and social-political spheres in which they move. In both domestic and academic spheres, for example, black women are 'devalued' as their blackness undercuts the ability to claim the kind of 'status' traditionally afforded white women. Whilst in the black community at large, black women are disempowered because their womanhood undermines attempts to speak with the same social and political authority as their male counterparts. On account of their color and their sex, black women are marginalized within their respective communities as the multifarious dynamics of identity construction and power distribution combine to 'negate a Black female reality' (1991, p. 12). All is not lost, however, for Collins argues that the marginality of black women as outsiders-within 'provides a distinctive angle of vision' (i.e. 'Black women's standpoint') from which they 'can make substantial contributions as agents of knowledge' in respect of their particular spheres of belonging (1991, p. 233). By speaking from the perspective of an outsider-within, black women furnish a critical discourse which is both novel (because marginal) and authentic (because insider). Worthy of emphasis, however, is the fact that Collins is not making an essentialist assertion but a constructionist one. For Collins, the 'distinctive angle of vision' which black women possess arises neither from their racial identity nor biological status. Rather, it results from a social-cultural location of marginality which is engendered (i.e. constructed) by the combined effects of racist forces and patriarchal processes.

Collins' use of 'outsider-within' to highlight the implications of variegated identities and power relations in positioning black women within their respective spheres of action lends itself to appreciating something of the dynamics of participant observation. Designed to engender sufficient rapport to enable the acquisition of meaningful qualitative data, as evidenced above the participant observational method can involve (indeed, often aspires after) the ascription of a qualified insider identity. Qualified in respect of its outsider connections, the insider identity ascribed to the participant observer nevertheless allows her to speak from within. No longer unqualifiedly 'outside', the voice of the participant observer nevertheless remains marginal in that neither is he fully 'inside' the researched community. In keeping with Collins' observations, however, the participant observer's status as outsider-within furnishes a 'distinctive angle of vision' from which a potentially insightful analysis might be offered.

Because the hybrid identity of the participant observer refracts a range of dynamics relative to her paradoxical status as outsider-within, as with Collins' use of the term, the participant observer's status as outsider-within is a constructed (i.e. positional) rather than essential identity. Because it arises from the relative interactions of, among other things, variegated insider responses, fluid social-cultural dynamics, established power flows, applied methodological strategies, and researcher-specific characteristics, the participant observer's status as outsider-within is constantly under construction and thereby in need of ongoing management and positional negotiation. This, of course, adds to the complexity of participant observation. For, not only must the researcher be at all times aware of the particular role s/he is employing (along with its fitness for purpose), s/he must also allow for the fact that different people are going to view and thereby respond to this role in a variety of ways.

For many long-term residents of Céu do Mapiá, the ascription of a 'provisional insider' identity reflected a relatively unproblematic acknowledgement of my dual status as outsider-within. Comfortable with the status-generating implications of my ritual participation, long-standing experience of intermittent academic visits or the short-term stays of ayahuasca backpackers allowed these individuals to accept with relative ease the bounded nature of my engagement with Santo Daime. For others, however, my paradoxical status as outsider-within proved a more problematic phenomenon. For those ascribing a 'potential real-insider' status, the variegated nature of my outsider-within identity constituted something of a terminological contradiction. In spite of prolonged ritual participation, my failure to resolve this contradiction by becoming *fadado* resulted in my labeling as either spiritually intransigent or beyond the metaphysical pale. The ascription of a 'counterfeit insider' identity likewise resulted directly from discomfort with my dual status as an outsider-within. Reading 'outsider' as 'enemy', my presence within Mapiá was taken as, among other things, a threat to the countercultural ethos of Santo Daime. Consequently, for the mainstreaming implications of my presence to be negated, my credentials as outsider would have to be emphasized by dismissing my ascribed insider status as counterfeit in nature. Whether accepting of my hybrid status as outsider-within, discomforted by it or in outright denial of its validity, insider responses to my participant observation offer valuable insight into varying articulations of the *daimista* worldview in play at Céu do Mapiá.

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