

Chapter 3

Methodological Approach

The core of this thesis is centered on the theme of ‘relationships’, i.e. relationships between statues and devotees. Spending time with devotees who regularly spend time with statues of the Goddess and Virgin as well as spending time with the statues myself, has led to the development of a *relational methodology*. A relational methodological approach complements and assists qualitative research methods where participant-observation in the form of dialogical, structured, semi-structured and informal interviews has taken place. A relational methodology does, however, favor informal interviews and casual conversations (where note taking is done *after* the event) so that recording and recording equipment do not impede or inhibit the ‘natural flow’ of conversation. Three foundations of this method are discussed below: Harvey’s ‘guesthood’, *Thinking Through Things*, and Primiano’s inductive approach.

Harvey’s (2003) ‘Guesthood as Ethical Decolonising Research Method’ acknowledges that ‘the field’, or research situation, is inevitably changed by the presence of the researcher (a notion that usually carries negative connotations because it points towards questions of behavioral authenticity). Harvey writes

The recognition that the act of observation changes things, including the observer (Pratchett 1994: 8), requires an acknowledgment that researchers change that which they research (however they do it) as well as themselves (2003: 142).

A relational methodology benefits from this acknowledgement. If, for example, Gell’s ‘human centered agency’ is considered, then the researcher being relationally present helps to answer the thesis questions by proposing that information arises according to who or what is ‘in the

neighborhood' (1998: 128), i.e. devotees, statues, other objects such as offerings, and me. Inspired by the *Thinking Through Things* methodological approach (Henare et al., 2007) which asserts that 'things' are capable of supporting their own discourses apart from human agents, a relational methodology adequately addresses the research questions because it takes into consideration all who are present during moments of research enquiry, i.e. human persons, object persons, and other persons who might be 'looking on' without being noticed. Primiano's (1995) inductive approach to vernacular religion as a method is also addressed because he discusses the implications of conducting research sensitively, where private, intimate encounters (here applied to statues) occur.

Qualitative Research and Participant Observation

Participant observation is the metaphorical grandfather of my relational methodology. Interviewing/speaking with people directly, as well as participating in ritual practices and observances, allows for more detailed experiences and accounts of information to be heard, recorded and most importantly, *understood*. David Goa (2000) tells us that,

It [research] clearly requires that you enter this landscape as someone interested in understanding, and I use the word advisedly. What we seek is 'understanding', not simply information (2000: 49-50).

However, the term 'understanding', while superficially effective, does not have the ability to accurately and deeply describe the multi-layered mix of complex emotions, feelings, thoughts, relationships and imaginations that create the whole of devotion and votive practice surrounding religious materiality. The researcher's arrival at clear understanding can best be attained, not only through empathic means of participating and observing, but through the use of dialogical,

reflexive, relational methodologies where the researcher takes his/her position as seriously as he/she takes the positions, perspectives and beliefs of the people being ‘observed’ or those being ‘participated with’. In this instance they are those would be actors in relational encounters with religious objects.

Qualitative research methods are suitable for this project because both objects and performers of religious expression are volatile, changing things that must be given the courtesy of fluidity and range of movement. A significant amount of time, personal contact and sensitivity are required to work with this project, which the more data driven approach used by quantitative research methods is not capable of providing. As this research is based upon intimate relationships with statues of the feminine divine, a research approach based on relational engagement is compatible with qualitative methods. As relationships are sometimes impeded by recording equipment, on many occasions during participant observation I have had to leave fieldwork situations in order to take notes with regards to significant material and observations. I found relaxed, unrecorded conversations to be the best way to extrapolate information. I did not always take notes so as not to interrupt the process but dialogue with hosts always enabled me to check the accuracy of my understanding if not of their precise words. Conducting qualitative research allows for personal relationships to develop between researcher and ‘informants’ and re-visits can often be expected to take place.

During formal and semi-formal interviews, I often found that the production of the consent form created tensions. People do not like signing forms if there is any confusion at all to what purposes the information will be used. These tensions (if any) were often dissipated with further explanation and once I made clear to informants that the forms also protected them, i.e. they

have the right to withdraw any information they do not wish used at any given time, and their names would not be used if this is what they requested.

Participant observation, while valid and applicable, is a reductionist based, ethnographically oriented anthropological research model from which new methodologies are being refined and based. Although it is used in principle in this research, it is not fully capable of adequately testing the role of materiality in contemporary religious contexts because, by its own origin and definition, it is dualistic. It implies *not relating*. To clarify, although relationships inevitably form during fieldwork encounters, participating and observing are two different modes of action that point to being caught in a constant state of tension, i.e. the researcher remains aloof in the mind, critically analyzing and reproducing information, while the researcher participates in events giving the illusion of fully taking part, or participating. Harvey writes,

If phenomenological research encourages a high degree of empathic engagement, it usually steps back from full participation. It seems acceptable to “walk in the shoes” of those among whom one researches, but only so long as it is clear that the shoes are borrowed (2004: 265).

It does not, however, need to be this way. A more relational approach converts the researcher from ‘participant observer’ to ‘researcher actively relating’ with his/her whole being. A relational methodology implies not being an ‘outsider’ or an ‘insider’. It implies being something ‘other’. A relational methodology takes the researcher to the transformative zone of relationality where relationships are not ‘cut and dry’. They are volatile and changeable. Participant observer researchers will have also been conducting research relationally, but within the etic and emic

confines required by participant observation. A relational approach adds another dimension, a relational dimension to research that signifies more holistic engagement with informants.

Guesthood as Methodological Approach

Guesthood as a research method that came about through Harvey's suggestion that,

academics could benefit considerably from considering Maori protocols in which strangers are turned, by careful stages, into guests rather than enemies, and should thereafter enact and perform their part of that complex relational role with integrity and respect (Harvey, 2003:126).

I am studying relational encounters with objects who are actually subjects, and these engagements require an understanding of relationships and intimacy rather than the glare of the critical, rational, reductionist, eye. For that matter, this research requires an *invitation*. Working on the Maori knowledge that every stranger is a potential enemy until they are turned into a guest, Harvey's proposal states that academics should not assume that their role as researcher grants them instant and favorable access to those peoples that they wish to research. One must be invited. Harvey says

Guest-researchers recognise that knowledge is gained in relationships, performance, negotiation and that these require active presence and a fuller participation than that available even to those who deem themselves participant observers (Harvey, 2003:142).

What better method to use in a thesis based on relationships?

Harvey's proposal of using guesthood as protocol also offers a remedial solution to the ethical problem that those being researched might have concerns about what academics do with the

knowledge they obtain. This fear is founded on past abuses where researchers have used their positions in the field to make false and inaccurate claims and value judgments based on divisive ‘us and them’ academic protocol. Hence, Harvey says that a ‘guest-researcher will recognise the powerful priority, sovereignty and intellectual property rights of hosts’ (Harvey, 2003:142). In other words, the potential of the researcher being transformed into a ‘guest’ and the person or group being researched becoming a ‘host’ strikes a power balance whereby the host has to know what is being said about him/her/them; and the guest-researcher has the courtesy and respect not to engage in any behavior that the host might find offensive, such as embellishing or manipulating information. This dialogical, relational approach means ‘checking’ information with informants, i.e. the guest’s interpretations about what is actually going on in research situations. Being a guest researcher means acknowledging that the host is in the more powerful position than the guest; but that guests still have the right to say what they think, argue, agree, or disagree freely, and that includes dialogically disagreeing with hosts about what the guest researcher ‘thinks’ they are doing.

If the researcher is truly achieving ‘guest status’ then the researcher should also not be obliged to accept negative assumptions that the hosts might have about him/her, even out of politeness. The guest researcher should be permitted to defend his or herself as he or she might in an ‘ordinary’ situation that is not centered on research. Sympathetic to past abuses and offenses that have befallen groups at the hands of researchers who have not behaved as guests, the guest researcher should be quick to acknowledge this and put the fears of the hosts at rest. Further, there is also the possibility that guest researchers and hosts might not ‘click’ and the researcher may have to accept that he or she has not achieved guest status and has remained an ‘enemy’. In

this case the researcher should recognize and respect this lack of guest researcher/host chemistry and not force the creation of relationships out the need for gathering information.

Given that relations are going well, being a guest-researcher also implies collaboration on projects, from which a great deal more can be learned as the ‘insider/ outsider’ divide can potentially dissolve and be transformed into dialogical, power sharing relationships where mutual respect is given and received. Guesthood produces more satisfactory results for everyone involved where basic participant observation maintains a more guarded researcher/informant divide.

A method of ‘things’

Methodological approaches in most disciplines have generally involved the distinct separations that define binary opposites such as subject and object, nature and culture, non-humans from humans, or idea from material. In response to the dualism found in the experience/analysis divide of anthropological discourse, *Thinking Through Things* (2007) offers a fresh methodological approach to an artifact-based study of ‘things’ that has been useful to how I have begun to ‘think about things’. Miller (2005) was correct when he wrote in the introduction to *Materiality* that it is ‘entirely possible to have a theory of objects as artifacts. Indeed, there are likely to be many of these’ (2005:7). Hence, the editors have compiled essays that have done just that. They have created a ‘thing’ theory. Instead of explaining away ethnographic accounts of the engagement with ‘things’ in terms of representation, significance and meaning, the *Thinking Through Things* project renders both researchers and things capable of producing a multiplicity of creative theories, novel ideas and concepts where “the ‘things’ themselves dictate a *plurality* of ontologies” (Henare, et al., 2007:7). This project moves toward

the absolute productivity of non-definition – towards a new impulse within anthropology to move beyond the development of evermore nuanced filters through which to pass phenomena, through to engagements with things as conduits for concept production (Henare, et al., 2007: 7).

A significant factor of this approach (one that I have tried to employ throughout this work, is compatible with the inductive approach) rests on the suggestion that the term ‘worlds’ is adopted in the place of ‘worldview’. The use of the word ‘worlds’ implies a respectful distance that allows for the possibility of being a good guest researcher and thereby *not* understanding (or trying to understand) everything about the relationships that people have with statues and offerings. In many instances it is not appropriate to intrude upon the personal and intimate relationships that people have with their divine focus, i.e. many of the performances and interactions that take place between devotees and statues of the Goddess and Virgin are done (as the case studies will demonstrate) in matters of need. Further, those needs are expressed to feminine deities who often play motherly roles. In line with the work of Viveiros de Castro (2004a), Latour (2005), and Ingold (2011), the usage of ‘worlds’ rather than ‘worldview’ helps curb the temptation to search out ‘meaning’ or ‘significance’ or ‘representation’ in informants’ actions and in the objects they relate to. Instead I have tried to listen and respect what others say they are doing and why they say they are doing it. As Vivieros de Castro says,

[A]nthropology is a discipline plagued since its inception by epistemological angst. The most Kantian of disciplines, anthropology is practiced as if its paramount task were to explain how it comes to know (to represent) its object – an object also defined as knowledge (or representation). Is it possible to know it? It is decent to know it? Do we really know it, or do we see it (and ourselves) through a glass, darkly? (2004: 483)

Thinking through “things” requires us to engage with people who live in different worlds. In researching and discussing materiality we are engaging both with epistemology (what people believe about the world) and ontology or, more adequately, *ontologies*.

I do not, however, think that a discourse based on the objects themselves providing researchers with their own creative theories ‘ticks all the boxes’. Like the flattering cut of a dress, it might help in dealing with problem areas, but it will not adequately penetrate the problems Western researchers face. For example, an object based discourse (opposed to a purely ‘anthro’-based discourse where objects have no agency apart from that which humans ‘allow’ them to have) allows for a certain amount of creativity to come into play in terms of theoretical approaches. Seeing that creativity plays an important role in my case studies, particularly in the case of the Glastonbury Goddess, room for the creation of creative, unorthodox theories is welcome. Miller is correct to criticize how the *Thinking Through Things* methodology has left out the role of human agency. Yet Miller’s overemphasis on the human-centered agency of objects is also lacking in that human interpretations of the roles of objects will often be representational. My methodological approach, however, can not only be considered relational, but *co-relational*. I am looking at that which is created *between* devotees and statues, and the negotiations that ensue accordingly. This applies to the fieldwork through my observations that statues and figures are *animate* in moments of relationship with devotees, an observation that is taken from the fact that devotees often speak to, give gifts and otherwise engage their statues of devotion. A relational methodology addresses this because it allows, like devotees allow, objects to be, become, much more than ‘objects’. A relational stance lets the ‘concept *be* the thing’, or the ‘thing *be* the concept’ (Henare, et al., 2007), and a good guest researcher will respect this emergence of personhood instead of maintaining a modern, rational, even scholarly distance.

An Inductive Approach to Vernacular Religion

Guest researchers are well suited to the unpredictable terrain that makes up the study of vernacular religion and relationships with religious materiality such as in the cases of the Virgin of Alcala and the Glastonbury Goddess. Leonard Primiano (1995) says,

Vernacular religion, as an approach embracing theory and method, incorporates attention to such ongoing interpretations and negotiations of religion within groups and institutions by providing theoretical awareness and ethnographic flexibility to the study of such individual creations of religion (1995: 51).

This is useful because it approaches the performances and devotions of Goddess Pagans and Catholic devotees as volatile, subjective experiences. Negotiations with the statues take place and creativity is a significant factor to both religiosities. For these reasons inductive approaches have been taken in this work to complement the usage of the vernacular religion approach. Although I had ideas about what kinds of theories I might produce in the beginning of the project, I did not enter into the work with a theory to prove or disprove (as with deduction). I went into the project with the inductive process in mind. I began with observations from which I drew out patterns. I came up with some ideas that might hypothetically lead to theories, and then I created theories (there are, in fact, more than one, but they are cohesive) capable of aiding in the understanding of the nature of religion in its performative, verb-like form, and the relationships that take place in shrine and temple settings with materiality.

Primiano writes,

Religion, as it is practiced and perceived calls out for an inductive approach which provides an alternative to the inadequacies of the two-tiered model. An inductive approach does more than simply extrapolate general principles from particular data. It generates a theory of and method for the study of religion based on criteria of religious validity established by the inner experience and perception of the believer. Scholarship on lived religion is, however, never a purely objective position, but rather a subjective composite of various analytical vantage points. A presentation of the beliefs of others occurs always through the filter of the empathetic perception and interpretation of the scholar. The inductive process balances the scholar's own knowledge and perspectives with the scholar's empathetic understanding of the individuals being studied. In this sense, the concerns of an inductive approach are oriented to the attempts of scholars to interpret cultural data in a way that is meaningful to their informants, as well as theoretically rigorous and responsible (1995: 40-41).

Although Primiano asserts that inductions should be made from the 'inner experience and perception of the believer', which is correct – we are concerned with what devotees and actors in relational encounters with objects say they are doing – I have also been looking at how those inner experiences and belief perceptions have affected the creation of and relationships with objects. Inner experience or belief in these case studies is not independent of the physical expressions that stem from relationships with objects. Methods in studying religious materiality do not fully benefit from being solely reliant on the inner workings of an individual's faith, although those accounts are beneficial. Inductions need to be made that consider how objects help make up networks of religious relations that consequently feed the contexts of a faith or belief system. I have made attempts to be sure that the results of my inductive reasoning have not

led to empirical truth claims about others, but have, instead, led to theories that express lines of possibilities for understanding the volatile, relational phenomena that take place in the worlds of others.

Informants and Interviews

The majority of the field work was carried out most from between August, 2007 to August, 2008 although subsequent visits carried on after this period. Two fieldwork concentrated visits were undertaken to Spain, while a series of ‘day visits’ were undertaken to Glastonbury (I live six miles from Glastonbury). I re-visited the shrine of the Virgin in June, 2009, June, 2010, July, 2011, and July, 2012; maintaining a friendship with the shrine steward, the *Santero* and consequently gathering more information about my case study. Further, I have maintained an acquaintance-like friendship with my main Goddess religion devotee (Georgina) and I regularly attend Goddess centered events in Glastonbury.

Within the case studies, an initial selection of informants led to further ‘connections’. Typical of my developing relational methodology, some of my informants had relationships with others who, after being introduced to me, also became informants. I met some of my informants by going and sitting in the temple, by attending public ceremonies and processions, or by making daily visits to the shrine. These were casual encounters. Sometimes the situations called for a ‘signing of consent forms’ while others were not appropriately suited to this. Of those who signed consent forms, one Spanish informant wished not to be named. Others said they did not mind being named. Those who did not sign consent forms are not named as they did not consent to being named. Kathy Jones is named because she is a well known public figure and author with regards to the Glastonbury Goddess Temple. I did not interview Jones formally, but I spent time

in her company on three different occasions and I have casually conversed with her. Further, I have both directly translated and paraphrased much of what the informants said in the Spanish case studies for reasons of translation. The translations were carried out by my husband (José) and I, my husband being Spanish and thus a fluent Spanish (and English) speaker. As he was present the interviews, he helped me to clarify and refine the information given to me by the Spanish informants.

In the case of the Virgin of Alcala, at the end of January, 2008 I returned to the shrine and spoke with the *Santero* (his name is Jose Luis but people call him the *Santero*) with an open view to ‘conducting proper fieldwork’ at and around the shrine of the Virgin. As this was my third visit to the shrine I had paid to the shrine (the first was the initial contact, the second was to camp for the night and participate and observe the procession of the Virgin the following day), the *Santero* remembered me; however, when I produced a consent form to sign, he immediately ‘clammed up’ and appeared nervous and guarded. He said he would not sign any forms. After I explained in more depth the reason for the form, he rang the village priest and asked for permission to speak with me. The village priest, a man in his late 20s called Father Marco, agreed to meet with me that day, and after that, he gave the *Santero* permission to speak with me. This encounter was strange. This ‘formality’ put a strain on mine and the *Santero*’s relationship for over two days. Whereas there had been a kind of jovial openness between us before, it seemed like the form ruined everything. I was very worried. He was more cautious in his dealings with me and watched his words carefully. A glimmer of hope returned when he suggested that my husband and I come back the following morning and pick asparagus with him in the surrounding countryside. After seeing how uneasy he was with the digital recorder and my writing notes, I decided the best way to interact with the *Santero* was to put my research

equipment to one side and just casually spend time with him. After the asparagus picking day, the relationship felt restored. The *Santero* began ringing up people in the village who are deeply involved members of the cult of the Virgin, and interviews with the three of the *camaristas*, the women who ritually bath and change the Virgin, were arranged.

The *camaristas* are an elite group of women within the local cult of the Virgin. The word *camarista* literally translated means ‘chamber maid’. This is due to the fact that the place where the Virgin sits in the shrine is called the *camara* or ‘chamber’. From interviews conducted with three of them in January, 2008, I found that they are chosen local women who exhibit certain virtuous qualities in the community. The three *camaristas* that I met varied in age. One of them, Francisca Jiménez Fernández (called ‘Paqui’), was a woman in her 50s. The other, Yolanda Quintero Díaz, was a woman who appeared to be in her mid thirties. She is a mother of two. The third *camarista* who wished not be named, seemingly out of shyness more than concern for the data she would give, appeared to be somewhere in her 40s, but it was difficult to tell for certain. There are roughly eight *camaristas* at any one time. In the past, *camaristas* would have been women who maintained their virginity throughout their lifetimes, i.e. women who are never married and who have remained virgins. The role of *camarista* would have also been passed down through generations to the unmarried women of a family. However, Yolanda told me that contemporarily, that particular aspect of the tradition has lost continuity. Of the three *camaristas* I met, Paqui still lives at home with her mother and has never been married. The others, I am told, are married, and this is contemporarily acceptable.

My being a foreigner seemed to inspire humor and mistrust simultaneously in the Spanish informants. Luckily, my husband came along and was able to explain with local humor, accent and familiar language (the people of Andalusia are renowned for their humorous, playful

dispositions), what I was doing and why. Although my Spanish was, as I thought, more than okay, I took the subtleties and nuances of language and culture for granted. Also, accents vary greatly in Andalusia and country villages often have their own local flavor of language use that many ‘outsiders’, Spanish or not, have difficulty in understanding. This proved difficult in the beginning and there were misunderstandings, but after revisits, some formal, some friendly, relationships began that are maintained to this day when we visit family in Spain. I followed up my interviews with the *camaristas* with ‘thank you’ cards.

I initially made contact with the Goddess Temple in Glastonbury in December of 2007 by emailing them through the ‘Contact Us’ button on the Goddess Temple website. The woman who responded was a priestess of Avalon called Georgina Sirett-Hardie, a woman in her mid 50s. We set up an interview via email. This was the beginning of a long steady flow of interviews with her. This informant gave me permission to email her if I had any questions, and I did when necessary, but took care to say to her that I knew it was her time and that she did not need to speak to me or respond if she was too busy. One day, Georgina did not turn up for our scheduled appointment. She had forgotten about our meeting, but was later very apologetic. I reassured her that it was her who was doing me a favor, not the other way around. After interviews I was often taken into the temple and shown around. I was also given the names and numbers of two others who I might want to speak with, specifically the woman who creates the Goddess figures that go in the temple, and the woman who does the paintings that hang in the temple. The woman who does the paintings that hang in the temple is the only one I spoke with as the other was unavailable.

Apart from the meetings with the *camaristas*, other information came about through my particular relational form of participating and observing. Here I chatted casually to Goddess

Pagans and Virgin devotees of both genders and many different ages. However, the Santero and the Priestess Georgina are my two major points of contact and sources with each case study.

With each of these informants, sometimes the conversations were formal, sometimes informal.

At times I had a list of printed out questions with me and other times I went causally to see what would come out of the conversations (running off and quickly writing down the information during either 'bathroom breaks' or after).

In the case of the Goddess informant, Georgina, there were times our conversations strayed from the subject matter drastically and we would be sat in the café for two or more hours chatting. I found myself at times using the knowledge that I had gained from being on my own spiritual path when I was younger to relate to Georgina, i.e. I know the language, because it used to be, and still is to some extent, part of my own language. As a researcher, reflexively, I think my greatest blunder with this informant came when I blurted out what I had been desperate to know from the beginning. I asked, 'So, is the Goddess embodied in the figure on the altar, or is this figure a representation'. This, I quickly realized, was a forceful, leading question. The informant stood there looking perplexed for what seemed like a long period of time, and finally she came back with 'embodied.' This answer was what I had hoped for, but my means of retrieving the information could have definitely used some refinement.

Participating and Observing as a Guest Researcher

Participating and observing as a guest researcher has inevitably required much physical activity.

Apart from the formal and semi-formal interviews, conducting fieldwork among the devotees

and care takers of the shrine and temple has required participations and observations in

processions, ceremonies, temple dressings, work and daily activities. I have been invited warmly

into the folds of these worlds, or ‘ontological phenomena’, where I have listened, watched, and learned. Here, also, I have helped paint and decorate the new Goddess Hall, and I have helped the *Santero* move rocks, water flower beds and pick asparagus while casually conversing about the shrine and other goings on.

During the course of this research I have experienced stirrings and waves of anxiousness in my stomach when I have asked for miracles to be granted, and I have been moved emotionally by encounters with that of the Virgin of Alcala. Yet what has moved me most is that I have been invited, as a guest, to participate with people in their devotion. I have held their hands in circles of ceremony, and I have learned to sing their devotional songs. I have been welcomed into their temples and shrines. Members from each of the two case studies have implied that I am there, not really as a researcher, but because ‘she’ (the Goddess or the Virgin) brought me there. Two informants have also suggested that I must have a secret, spiritual agenda, and that agenda is to find spiritual fulfillment and to have faith restored, or born anew. However, only rarely did I doubt the reasons why I was there.

Although I did not ‘go native’, i.e. I did not become Catholic, as might be expected using a relational methodology, I developed a relationship with the Virgin of Alcala which exists long past my fieldwork there. This is because there were honest moments when I felt moved during physical encounters with her (this is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3). Theoretically, the methodological implications of ‘going native’ would potentially cloud my ability to be a good guest researcher, i.e. I would have developed a sense of over identification with the Virgin and crossed the boundary between ‘guest’ and ‘researcher’, becoming an emotionally involved participant/practitioner. In this case the empathy I developed from my relational venture with the Virgin of Alcala proved to help me better understand the relationships that devotees have with

her. My emotional tie with the Virgin is reflected in the passion with which I wrote about her in this thesis.

Eating and Drinking with Informants: Putting theories where the mouth is

As a guest-researcher, I applied Harvey's guesthood methodology (2003) in my own ways, which included a focus on eating and drinking. Eating and drinking are two of the more pleasant things that all human beings do together and have in common. So what better way to traverse the boundaries of researcher and informant than through food and drink? Both Harvey's guesthood method and my own experiences and time living in Spain with my husband's vocally unrepressed Spanish family have taught me that the dinner table is not only a pleasant place to be because most people enjoy eating, but it is where significant negotiations occur. The dinner table is where things that are important are said. It is where conclusions are drawn, where thoughts are shared, and where plans are finalized. Eating and drinking, as such, are two of the 'great equalizers' of human kind, along with death, birth, sex and bodily functions.

This research method of extending an invitation to dine or drink is applied after initial contact by phone or e-mail is made. It is the middle ground, the initiatory point, or the twilight period where the crucial decision is made. Am I friend or foe? In Maori protocol, am I a potential guest or a potential enemy as I appear on the horizon? Will the informant be able to host me or not? In Western terms, eating and drinking is the closest thing we have to Maori protocol, yet this, too, is also part of later Maori protocol after breathing together (*hongi*) takes place.

I was able to apply this 'method', which is not a method as it comes with relating as a human being, with the *Santero* on three occasions and with the Priestess of Avalon on four occasions. I was also able to eat and drink with the Goddess group after a day's labor. This eating and

drinking with informants was easy to implement with the Spanish case study. As mentioned before, in Spain, conversations, in fact social lives, revolve around food. Hence, time spent with the *Santero* has involved cooking, eating, and drinking. At the end of the asparagus picking day, he swiftly took back a bundle to the shrine (where he lives with his wife and children), and began to make an asparagus Spanish tortilla. I know this was meant to be the other way around, i.e. I invite the informants for food and/or drink to see if I am later given an invitation to come 'in'; yet it worked out in reverse here. While the *Santero* was cooking the tortilla, the drinks began to flow, and as is the custom during *la comida* (late lunch for us), the drinks were alcoholic. The *Santero* appeared to take a deep delight in introducing me to foods and drinks specific not only to Spain, but to the countryside around Alcala. The wine was made locally; the eggs and the asparagus, we collected ourselves. I felt as though I was eating and drinking the place, the location. Those flavors mixed with the air and the scenery (the shrine is nestled in hills surrounded by countryside and expansive views) gave me a sense of place not experienced before. When I returned to the shrine the following years in the summers of 2009, 2010 and 2011, the *Santero* 'fed' my family and I each time. Not only that, he greeted our baby daughter with affection and fatherly advice.



3.1 The *Santero* with Lucia

I also had the opportunity to eat and drink with Goddess informants where I invited, and I paid. There was no alcohol, just tea and coffee, and food was taken at a local café, the same café that became our habit for meetings. We had lunch, and we talked through lunch. I noticed how people and their moods change when food arrives and during eating. Also, on the day that I worked at the Goddess Hall doing painting and decorating, I sat around the table with devotees and ate lunch with them while mainly listening to their conversation and sometimes participating. This is a research approach that I will continue to use in future research projects.