

Theorizing Faith:

The Insider/Outsider Problem in
the Study of Ritual

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6 “Going Native in Reverse”: The Insider as Researcher in British Wicca

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Introduction

Since its inception in the 1950s and continuing into the 1990s, modern witchcraft has attracted increasing public attention.¹ Once misunderstood,² it has become a relatively acceptable spiritual alternative within the plurality of modern religiosity.³ Drawing on pagan traditions of the past, images of the witch, and the occult revival of the *fin de siècle*, modern witchcraft presents itself as a modern-day mystery religion (Wicca), a form of feminist/Goddess spirituality (feminist witchcraft), the survival of ancient rural wisdom (hedgewitchcraft) and a means by which magic is returned to an otherwise disenchanted world. Publications on the subject of modern witchcraft increase seemingly year by year, and the academic study of witchcraft and Paganism is becoming more popular.⁴ Yet, the emergence of modern witchcraft into relative popularity since the late 1970s and 1980s⁵ has engendered diverse manifestations of what is often simply called ‘the Craft’.⁶

This chapter begins by outlining the three main types of witchcraft which have emerged over the past 50 years. It then concentrates on Wicca as the focus for researching initiatory religion as an ‘insider’. Some problems associated with the study of such religions are addressed in a critical examination of earlier research by Tanya Luhrmann. The chapter closes with an assessment of the insider/outsider position suggesting that, rather than being essentially problematic, such a position can in fact be advantageous to the researcher, the research, and the researched community.

Contemporary Forms of Witchcraft: Three Types

Wicca has developed into a number of contemporary forms since the 1950s, some of which call themselves a variation of ‘Wicca’, and some of which

identify themselves as a type of 'witchcraft'. From these, three main types have emerged—Wicca, feminist witchcraft, and hedgewitchcraft. These three different entities are often conflated into a mythically normative 'Wicca' or 'witchcraft', which is generalized across a broad spectrum. Due to the inherent problems of such generalizations, it may be useful to present an 'ideal typology' of witchcraft in the 1990s, firstly in order to avoid confusion, and secondly in order to specify the focus of this chapter.

Wicca

In the 1950s, Wicca emerged in Britain as a highly ritualistic, nature venerating, polytheistic, magical and religious system, which made use of Eastern techniques, but operated within a predominantly western framework. It arose from the cultural impulses of the *fin de siècle*, in particular from the occult revival of the 1880s onwards. Various threads were gradually gathered together and woven into Wicca in the 1940s by Gerald Gardner.

Wicca became more widely known in the 1950s with the publication of Gardner's books, *Witchcraft Today* (1954) and *The Meaning of Witchcraft* (1959), and in the early 1960s, it was exported to North America. Gardner died in 1964, but his tradition of Gardnerian Wicca was firmly established, much to the annoyance of those who practised Traditional and Hereditary witchcraft, which they believed to be a witchcraft religion older than Gardner's Wicca.⁷ Another current was injected into this stream in the 1960s, as Alex Sanders brought a stronger application of high ritual magic to his branch of Wicca.

Alexandrian and Gardnerian Wiccans are those with a provable line of descent, by initiation from Gerald Gardner, Alex and Maxine Sanders, or both. Gardnerian witches trace their initiatory lines back to Gerald Gardner and practise a form of Wicca subtly different from that of Alexandrian Wicca. Alexandrians trace their initiatory lineage back to the more recent influential figure of Alex Sanders. Due to increased dialogue between Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca, many practices are in fact a synthesis of the two traditions, and an increasing number of witches are initiated jointly or separately into both traditions, thus tracing their lineage back to both Gardner and Sanders.

Thus, today, many Wiccans are initiates of both Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wicca. The differences between the two traditions have been played down, and the similarities and synthesis are emphasized to such an extent that some Wiccans claim that there is no difference between them. While others retain a 'pure' Gardnerian or Alexandrian practice, a great deal of ritualizing and socializing occurs between practitioners of both traditions.

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Feminist Witchcraft

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With the publication of *Witchcraft* (1959), Gardner died in 1963. Gardner established, much to the surprise of Hereditary witchcraft, an Gardner's Wicca.⁷ In the 1960s, as Alex Sanders established his branch of Wicca. Sanders has a provable line of descent from Maxine Sanders, or rather back to Gerald Gardner that of Alexandrian Wicca. In the more recent dialogue between the two, in fact a synthesis of the two, are initiated jointly or back to both Gardner

both Gardnerian and Alexandrian traditions have been emphasized to such an extent between them. In practice, a great deal of both traditions.

Both traditions have influenced each other, and both regard themselves as so similar that we can now talk of 'Alexandrian and Gardnerian Wicca' in one breath, or conflate the two and refer to them as 'Alexandrian/Gardnerian', especially given the number of Wiccans who are initiates of the two traditions combined. It is the Alexandrian, Gardnerian, and combined Alexandrian/Gardnerian traditions of Wicca on which this chapter specifically concentrates.

Feminist Witchcraft

The development and movement of Wicca beyond its traditional boundaries took place largely in North America in the late 1970s and 1980s, at a time when the New Age Movement was becoming conscious of itself as a movement and when feminist spirituality was emerging (see e.g. Hanegraaff, 1998: 85–87). This should draw our attention to obvious parallels between the three movements. All three are, for instance, regarded as having their roots in the counter-culture of the 1960s and as having developed interdependently. An example of the development of new forms of witchcraft will suffice to illustrate this point. Wicca, as it was traditionally practised in Britain, was exported to the United States by Raymond Buckland in the 1960s where, according to Orion (1995: 143), it was transformed into a "very different kind of religion".⁸ In particular, Wicca was adapted by the women's spirituality movement, resulting in the development of Pagan Goddess spirituality and feminist witchcraft traditions, such as Dianic and Reclaiming witchcraft. This "mutant 'Feminist Witchcraft'", according to Salomonsen (1996: 32), developed, as female witches gradually took part in the Women's Movement and "in some cases met, in other cases helped create, the Goddess Movement" (ibid: 32; Bonewits, 1989: 110). The Goddess Movement, however, has not adopted witchcraft, but has been inspired by the use of ritual expression in witchcraft.⁹ Wicca and feminist/Goddess spirituality thus blend into each other, and it is predominantly this blurring of distinctions between the original British Wicca and North American feminist witchcraft into a normative, generally applied (mis)understanding of Wicca/witchcraft which has been the reason for misrepresentative categorization.

Yet, the distinctly feminist branch of witchcraft has little in common with Alexandrian and Gardnerian Wicca in Britain beyond an initial framework of rituals centred around the seasonal changes of the year. Feminist witchcraft, for example, explicitly emphasizes the Goddess as representative of divinity, attempts to maintain an explicitly non-hierarchical organization inherited from the feminist consciousness movement (in which women rotate

leadership and make collective decisions), and engages in political activism after the feminist saying "the personal is political is spiritual" (Culpepper 1978: 222). Alexandrian and Gardnerian Wicca, however, emphasize both gods and goddesses as representative of divinity, allow a 'hierarchy of experience' (implicit in their organization in covens led by a High Priestess and/or High Priest and the structure of three degrees of initiation), and tend to maintain a distance between spirituality and politics. Whereas Alexandrian and Gardnerian Wicca can be considered one entity, feminist witchcraft is an altogether different entity, consciously distinct from its non-feminist kin.

In order to distinguish between these two currents, I refer to Alexandrian and Gardnerian 'Wicca' and to feminist 'witchcraft'. This distinction partly reflects the terminology used by practitioners. On the one hand, Wiccans use the term 'Wicca' to denote a mystery religion involving a process of initiation and rigorous training within a cosmos polarized between male and female forces, all of which is an inheritance from the magical secret societies from which Wicca is descended. The term is also used in order to differentiate between the anthropological study of 'primitive', tribal witchcraft¹⁰ and the Wiccan religion of Western, literate, post-industrial society (re)invented by Gerald Gardner in Britain in the 1940s and developed since that time into its contemporary forms. On the other hand, feminist witches prefer the term 'witchcraft', using it to describe a religious practice based upon the human (female) witch becoming empowered through interaction with the Goddess as divine counterpart of the witch, an empowerment which is sought in order to provide personal liberation for the individual woman and thus sustain women in their struggle against patriarchy. Feminist witchcraft is thus located within the wider feminist spirituality and Goddess movements, making use of a constructed image based on a feminist reading of the witchcraft persecutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and on the myth of matriarchy, both of which are preferred alternatives to a legacy from secret societies, which are regarded as a predominantly male preserve, and Gerald Gardner as founding father.

Hedgewitchcraft

The third strand of witchcraft is Hedgewitchcraft. Hedgewitches are usually solitary practitioners, and as such operate with no hierarchy or organizational structure,¹¹ do not necessarily regard witchcraft as a religion, and therefore may, or may not, honour gods and goddesses. Where witchcraft is seen as religious practice, a ritual of self-dedication to a particular god and/or goddess may be performed rather than an initiation. Hedgewitches perceive

Wicca as the organized, institutionalized religion, and see themselves as witches, rather than as Wiccans. They reject the myths of feminist witchcraft. Their version of the 'cunning' or 'hedge' witch is drawn to be the wise people, rather than the people used for healing, midwifery, or magic. They are used in this tradition to the phases of the moon.

In outlining these two currents, the idea of witchcraft/Wicca is distinguished from the idea of witchcraft/Wicca. In this chapter, I shall, however, distinguish between the two, which can occur in the same way. These might be mitigated by the insider and outsider in the disadvantages of the two.

Tanya Luhrmann

In 1983, Tanya Luhrmann published her book, *Persuasions of the Devil*, a study of Wicca as practiced in the UK. It was joined by Ronald Inge's *Pagan Witchcraft*, it was a study of Wicca. Thus, to date, it has been within academia. I have had problems with her work. I was in a coven in London and the subtitle of her book is a representative study of the study is, to my mind, a sample: capital cities and the suburbs.

Secondly, while Luhrmann is in anthropological work, she is magical practices in question her own practice. She sees herself into believing

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Wicca as the organized form of witchcraft, operating almost as an institutionalized religion; in order to distance themselves from it, they identify themselves as witches, hedgewitches, ditch witches or green witches rather than as Wiccan. They have little in common with Wiccan history¹² or the myths of feminist witchcraft, but rather regard themselves as the modern version of the 'cunning man' or the 'wise woman'. The heritage of hedgewitches is drawn from the lore of the cunning folk, who were believed to be the wise people in particular rural locations, to whom people would turn for healing, midwifery, fertility spells, charms and blessings. Magic and spells used in this tradition tend to be natural, based on a knowledge of herbalism, the phases of the moon, and the seasonal cycle of the earth.

In outlining these three types of witchcraft, my aim has been to dispel the idea of witchcraft/Wicca as a monolith and to provide some of the distinguishing features of the different types. For the remainder of this chapter, I shall, however, focus on Wicca, explaining some of the problems which can occur in the study of such a religion and suggesting ways in which these might be mitigated. In so doing, my emphasis turns to the status of insider and outsider in initiatory systems, and the consequent advantages and disadvantages of the researcher's position as insider/outsider.

Tanya Luhrmann and the Study of British Wicca

In 1983, Tanya Luhrmann began fieldwork among witches in London; her book, *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft* ([1989], 1994), became the first academic study of Wicca as practised in Britain. Indeed, until December 1999, when it was joined by Ronald Hutton's *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*, it was the only published academic monograph on British Wicca. Thus, to date, Luhrmann's work, unfortunately, remains definitive within academia. I say 'unfortunately' because there are a number of problems with her work. Firstly, her study is limited largely to one Wiccan coven in London and to witches practising in the London area, yet, the subtitle of her book, *Ritual Magic in Contemporary England*, suggests a representative study of Wiccan magical practice in the whole of England. Her study is, to my mind, limited in scope and based on a small, unrepresentative sample: capital cities are rarely representative of a nation.

Secondly, while Luhrmann argues that the paradigms of magic presented in anthropological work among primitive societies is inadequate to interpret magical practices in literate, post-industrial western society, she fails to question her own premise that western magicians in the 1980s must *fool* themselves into believing in magic in order to retain their rational stance in

their everyday lives. In contrast to earlier North American sociological studies, her inquiry was not based on questions of social deviancy, but instead set out to consider why people become involved in the occult and whether one has to be, or whether one becomes, 'irrational' in order to 'believe' in magic. However, in following this argument, Luhrmann perpetuated the reductionist approach used to portray the occult, magic, witchcraft, paganism—indeed, even religion—as irrational.

Assuming that magic is a non-conformist, irrational mode of interpretation which requires a complex social and mental initiation process in order to be appropriated, Luhrmann developed the notion of 'interpretive drift'. This "slow, often unacknowledged shift in someone's manner of interpreting events as they become involved in a particular activity" (Luhrmann, 1989: 340) is used to explain people's acceptance of magic and magical practice.

Although applied to the magicians and witches she studied, 'interpretive drift' does not, however, seem to apply to Luhrmann herself, a 'rational' scholar who, as a modern, successfully socialized social scientist, is apparently immune to irrational concepts, such as religion, witchcraft, and magic. Although she was initiated into a coven and welcomed at a variety of rituals, Luhrmann stresses, "I am no witch, no wizard, though I have been initiated as though I were", and points out, "I never have, and do not now 'believe' in magic" (ibid: 18, 19). Like Michael Faber (1993), Luhrmann retreats to a position which reduces Wicca and magical practice to a childish, regressive state, in which "these witches were recreating a childhood world, enchanting adulthood" (Luhrmann, 1989: 19). In so doing, Luhrmann ignores the fact that magic has existed as part of human life experience for millennia, and instead reduces reality to empirical daily life by which the reality of any religious view of the world is invalidated. The consequence is that witchcraft (and indeed, religion) becomes 'something else', becomes 'other', and is devalued.

The American anthropologist Katherine Ewing has criticized this reductive and analytical approach to religion, which Luhrmann adopted, and its implicit methodological premises. Ewing claims that

[t]hough [Luhrmann's] research strategy involved becoming initiated into several practising groups, her research did not lead her to question her own premises about rationality. She assumed that belief entails a move from a stance of rationality to an acceptance of the irrational, an assumption that, it could be argued, is embedded within the atheistic hegemonic discourse in which anthropology participates. (Ewing, 1994: 573)

Ewing reminds us that in running the risk of anthropologizing, we refuse to accept the human condition as the anthropologist's domain.

This is the problem for the anthropologist: the concern is the position of the researcher, the community with which the anthropologist is working, the benefits of the anthropologist's experience in the field. *denial is to make a hollow*" (Ewing, 1994: 573).

Studying V

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Some social scientists (Salomonson, 1994) have a duty and responsibility to the community. Such a community is initiatory. Wicca is one of the most explained the used information in British Wicca not to be r

Ewing reminds us that a scholar who takes belief seriously 'unfortunately' runs the risk of 'going native', one of the few taboos remaining in anthropology, but Ewing stresses that the opposite stance is problematic—if we refuse to acknowledge that the people studied may know something about the human condition that might also be personally valid for the anthropologist.

This is the major problem with which this chapter is concerned; it is a problem for which Luhrmann has been severely criticized. The problem concerns the ambiguity of the insider/outsider position and the ethical position of the researcher, not only with regard to the community s/he is researching, but also with regard to future researchers and the academic community whom s/he is representing. For although Luhrmann experienced the benefits of participation as an insider, she is thought by some to have misrepresented herself to other participants or to have denied her own experience in her ethnography. In either case, Ewing suggests, "*the effect of her denial is to make her claims of respect for the people she worked with sound somewhat hollow*" (Ewing, 1994: 573, my emphasis).

Studying Wicca—Access and Limitations

Among the Wiccan community in Britain, Luhrmann is regarded by some as a 'pretender' who was initiated into Wicca on false pretences, was unethical in her research, and misrepresented Wicca in her book. Certainly, as I have indicated, Luhrmann portrays witches as somewhat childish and irrational, a portrayal which I have found—in my own fieldwork—to be a misrepresentation. However, I cannot claim to know whether the accusations against Luhrmann are true, although Luhrmann herself says, "I was honest about my enterprise, but my intention was to fit in, to dispel outsider status, and *I was rather relieved when people forgot what I had so carefully told them*" (Luhrmann, 1989: 18, my emphasis).

Some scholars have criticized British Wiccans for being 'naive' (Salomonsen, 1996: 56), for forgetting that an anthropologist is always on duty and for feeling 'jilted'¹³ when Luhrmann finished her study and moved on. Such comments do not take into account the underlying trust inherent in initiatory Wiccan covens in Britain. One of my contacts, who was an initiate of one of the London covens which accepted Luhrmann as a visitor at rituals, explained that she had felt that Luhrmann operated covertly and that she had used information given in trust, i.e. in a circle.¹⁴ A generally accepted 'rule'¹⁵ in British Wicca is that things said in a circle between participants in ritual are not to be repeated outside; therefore, it is hard to accuse witches of being

'naïve'. Since Luhrmann had been initiated and was known to be studying Wicca *in the field*, it was not unreasonable of Wiccans to expect her to honour commonly observed rules and to be capable of drawing a line between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. It was hardly surprising that when I began my fieldwork in 1994, eleven years after Luhrmann started her fieldwork, I found Wiccans still feeling they could not trust anyone studying Wicca; one priestess even asked me, 'You're not going to do another Tanya on us, are you?' It is quite obvious, but nevertheless worth pointing out, that the effects of previous research in a particular field on later researchers can be extremely negative.

Breach of trust by a researcher in an initiatory religion cannot, to my mind, be excused by accusing the researched community of naïveté. This is particularly so when working in religions which regard themselves as secret, initiatory mystery traditions. Luhrmann asserts that she was initiated 'as though she were' a witch. She must therefore have taken vows of secrecy at her initiation and, as Vivianne Crowley reminds us in the introduction to her volume *Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Millennium*, "[t]he words of the oath of the first initiation bind us to secrecy" (Crowley, 1996: x).

Without a doubt, in conducting the first academic study of British Wicca, Luhrmann undermined what could have become a trusting relationship between Wiccans and researchers, and made it more difficult for those following after her. It has taken considerable effort to rebuild that relationship, which could have been avoided, if Luhrmann had, as Sarah Pike points out,

dealt more completely with the ambiguities and tensions that accompanied her role as participant-observer. She discusses what she shares with the London magicians and yet disavows an identity as a magician or witch. Such disclaimers are problematic when studying within one's own culture... More clarity on her part about the nature of her ambiguous role as insider/outsider would have been helpful. (Pike, 1996: 366)

Such ambiguities are made all the more explicit when one is studying a group of people who make themselves inaccessible through veils of secrecy. The self-styled mystery religion of Wicca, with three levels of initiation, is therefore not easy to investigate from the position of an 'outsider'. A barrier must be crossed in order to study Wicca as a religion in any level of depth and without misrepresenting its practitioners. Luhrmann crossed that barrier and was initiated into at least four groups, one of which was a Wiccan coven; but the barrier was crossed as part of an intellectual process, and she remained an

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outsider to the extent that she was, allegedly, able to disregard her initiation vows, break the trust of those who accepted her into their homes and rituals, and act unethically. How does the researcher enter such a field and undertake effective fieldwork with integrity, without dishonouring the mode of entry (initiation) and the trust of his/her research community?

The 'Insider/Outsider' Dichotomy

Since Luhrmann herself failed to address these concerns in her research on witchcraft and has been criticized for this failure, we cannot ourselves neglect to grapple with the ambiguous insider/outsider role. I have myself crossed the same boundary as Luhrmann, but with one difference—my initiation into Wicca was not part of an intellectual process related to my doctoral research, but a genuine initiation into a religion which I had been personally involved in, albeit as a pre-initiate, for some eighteen months previously. During those months, I began to study on the Wicca Correspondence Course, attend Pagan events, and make contacts with initiated Wiccans. It was not until twelve months later that I registered as a PhD student in the Department of Religious Studies at Lancaster University.

Therefore, I do not consider myself to have broken the anthropological taboo against 'going native', for I was a 'native' already. The situation has, in fact, been quite the opposite, one of "insider going outsider, going native in reverse" (Puttick, 1997: 6). Rather than being an outsider who has become intensely involved in my field of research to such an extent that I became part of it, I have instead come from inside my field of research to employ an insider/outsider position which would allow me to study Wicca as scientifically as possible on a foundation of thorough knowledge. Nevertheless, the ambiguities remain. Could I, as an insider, maintain the required objective stance deemed necessary to produce an effective study?

The 'insider as researcher' position is becoming increasingly common, as Elizabeth Puttick points out, and must therefore be considered within the academy. As a former member of the Osho movement, Puttick has first-hand experience of this process and is worth quoting at some length. She says,

this is now becoming an increasingly common situation, resulting in the blurring of boundaries between the subjects and objects of study. As new religions are becoming more integrated into mainstream society, they appeal more than ever to ... academics, who may therefore cross the line out of personal interest. At the same time members of NRMs are becoming less anti-intellectual, perceiving the value of certain academic

disciplines for understanding religion, and joining the ranks of academia as students and teachers. This trend presents a challenge to traditional notions of objectivity and the subject/object duality which are the basis of scientific methodology. (Puttick, 1997: 6)

She goes on to explain Weber's methodology of *verstehen*, which values primarily an understanding of the inner experience and interpretation of practitioners, since "only if he [*sic*] can gain some apprehension of what it means to be a believer can he say anything useful about the religious movement he studies; and yet, in gaining that understanding, he must not actually become a believer" (Weber, 1982: 13, cited in Puttick, 1997: 6). Even here, the bias is still towards the outsider position and we must therefore question whether one can truly be an outsider and gain any understanding of the practitioners' stance in an esoteric mystery tradition, such as Wicca, which requires initiation as the means of entry.

I have already mentioned the vows of secrecy which form part of the first initiation in Wicca. It is, to my mind, a serious breach of trust if one then breaks one's oath in order to fit a pre-ordained academic code. We must, it seems, ask ourselves whether such codes are any longer viable, given the increasing popularity of alternative spirituality. If one follows the established rule of maintaining distance in order to produce quantitative studies of a sociological nature, one risks basing such studies on a profound lack of understanding of the religious community itself. On the other hand, if one involves oneself in a religious community to produce qualitative studies, one risks neglecting to provide any empirical data through which the community being researched may be contextualized. It seems far more appropriate to combine the two approaches, so that quantitative material is informed by a solid bedrock of depth understanding, and qualitative material adequately framed and contextualized by empirical data.¹⁶

We return to my original question: could I, as an insider, maintain the required objective stance deemed necessary to produce an effective study? Firstly, we must make the point that objectivity as an absolute cannot exist—research, especially research which involves people, will always have some effect on the researcher, and will always be filtered by the researcher's own subjective views. It is therefore necessary to apply a rigorous self-reflexivity in order to bracket off personal beliefs and values, *whether one is an 'insider' or an 'outsider'* to the religious community one is researching (cf. Puttick, 1997: 6).

It was not an easy decision to 'come out', as it were, as an insider. Yet, the necessity for me as a researcher to situate myself with reference to my object of study became increasingly clear. Given my knowledge about Wicca as a mystery religion, it seemed all too obvious that I must be an initiate in order

to have gained this knowledge to be anything else. In this position is more valuable than scientific objectivity. In addition, it is a fact in itself to be studied whether or not it is clear that there are people who cannot follow Luhmann's lead and have been initiated and can reveal a profound lack of academic study as well. As Ninian Smart has said, a doctorate, without initiation, with their own sense (Smart, 1997: 6).

I would maintain the position of the outsider; but the experience brought to the fore upon which inductive research is based if the two perspectives are studied of religion with an ethical and informed community nor that.

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to have gained this knowledge, and it therefore seemed impossible to pretend to be anything else. I concur with Puttick's belief that "to admit one's personal position is more valid and illuminating than hiding behind the defence of scientific objectivity, which is anyway unobtainable" (Puttick, 1997: 8). In addition, it is a fact in religious studies that there are some religions which can be studied whether one is 'inside' or 'outside' that tradition. It is perhaps less clear that there are some religions where this is not the case. Therefore, I cannot follow Luhrmann's disclaimer and say that 'I am not a witch though I have been initiated as though I were', for such disclaimers—to my mind—reveal a profound lack of respect for both the religion and the discipline of academic study as well as bring into question the integrity of the researcher. As Ninian Smart has asserted, if one "visits a village simply to get material for a doctorate, without consideration of the villagers as fellow human beings with their own sensitivities and concerns, that is arrogant and heartless" (Smart, 1997: 6).

I would maintain that the insider perspective is at least as valuable as that of the outsider; Peter Berger points out that "one's own faith and the experience brought on by this faith will actually constitute 'data' or 'evidence' upon which inductive reflection can take place" (Berger, 1979: 141). However, if the two perspectives can be combined, perhaps we can move towards a study of religion which provides a depth of understanding which is both ethical and informative, and which denies the value of neither the religious community nor that of the academy.

I have attempted to portray the research relationship diagrammatically in order to outline the negotiation of the insider/outsider position (see Fig. 1).¹⁷

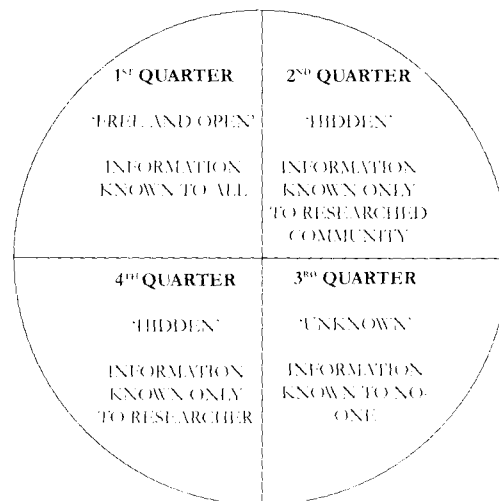


Figure 1 The Insider/Outsider Position

The first quarter is 'free and open', representing what is known to both the religious community and to the researcher, what is common knowledge, although it may be inaccurate.¹⁸ The third quarter represents what is known neither to the researcher nor to the researched community. The second and fourth quarters represent, respectively, what is known only to the researched community and what is known only to the researcher—those areas which are likely to be, and indeed may even remain, hidden realms. It is in the interface between the second and fourth quarters that the relationship between the researcher and researched community is negotiated, and where the research proper takes place.

In my use of the word 'hidden', I am concerned chiefly with knowledge which is 'hidden' due to lack of expertise or experience, particularly at the beginning of a study, rather than implying that things are deliberately hidden by either the researcher or the researched community. Although the latter scenario can sometimes be the case, resulting in a possible 'stalemate' or stagnation of the research, the aim of this diagram is to explore a rather more fluid scenario, whereby those 'hidden' sections *on both sides* become less predominant as the research progresses and, consequently, the 'free and open' section is expanded in a mutually beneficial and respectful manner.

There are obvious similarities between my diagram and the Johari Window, developed by Professors Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham (Johari is a combination of the authors' first names, 'Jo' and 'Hari') to map four states of awareness. The 'public' state represents what I know of myself and what the public knows of me; the 'secret' state represents what I know of myself, which the public does not know of me; the 'blind' state represents what the public knows of me, which I do not know of myself; and the 'unknown' state represents what neither I nor the public knows of me.¹⁹ If we combine the Johari Window with my diagram, we can perhaps consider our own 'blind', 'secret', and 'unknown' states, and perhaps attain a greater state of awareness of our motives as researchers.

To take Wicca as an example, the first quarter could represent Wicca as a Pagan religion, a generally known 'fact' about the researched community, which the researcher also knows. The third quarter, on the other hand, could represent the secrets of the ancient mystery religions upon which Wicca draws, but which have not been revealed during the course of history and are therefore known neither to the researcher nor to the researched community. The second quarter could represent the differences between the variety of Wiccan and witchcraft traditions and the ongoing differentiation between Wicca and Paganism, which might be 'hidden' to the researcher, at least at the beginning of the research period. The fourth and final quarter, on the other hand, could represent the different theories and categories of religion, which

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known to both the common knowledge, presents what is known. The second and third quarters deal with the researched community. The first and fourth quarters deal with those areas which are 'grey areas' or 'unknown' state. The relationship between the researcher and the researched community is in the interface between the two. Where the research is hidden from the researched community, simply because the community does not know of them.

With knowledge particularly at the 'grey areas' or 'unknown' state, though the latter is a rather more 'free and open' manner.

Johari Window, a model of self and what the self knows of itself, presents what the 'unknown' state is. It combines the 'blind' and 'hidden' aspects of awareness.

Wicca as a community, on the other hand, could be seen as a 'hidden' state and are a community. The variety of 'unknown' state between the two, at least at the beginning, which

may be hidden from the researched community, simply because the community does not know of them.

In leaving aside the first and third quarters, which deal with what is widely acknowledged and what is unlikely ever to be known, we come to the crux of the research, the 'grey areas'. Here, the researcher and the researched community engage in a dialectic relationship in which the researcher aims to learn about the community (second quarter) within the framework of his/her own reference points (fourth quarter), while the community finds out about its own context within that wider frame of reference and aims to maintain its integrity within it.²⁰ In initiatory religions, such as Wicca, this relationship can become exceedingly strained, as the researched community also attempts to maintain its 'mysteries' or secrets in the face of investigation. While the information offered through such a relationship can assist in discarding incorrect perceptions among outsiders (resulting from lack of familiarity with Wicca), it may also, as Wouter Hanegraaff warns in a general sense, "unveil aspects of the religion which are unknown and surprising (and not necessarily welcome) to the believers themselves" (Hanegraaff, 1998: 6).

Conclusion

The insider-as-researcher position is becoming increasingly common and increasingly recognized by the academy. For example, Jacob Needleman, has suggested, with regard to the study of esoteric spirituality, that "scholars need to allow the seekers *within themselves* to exist; and seekers after esoteric knowledge must, for their part, allow within themselves the validity of the outward, analytical, or critical mind" (Needleman & Faivre, 1992: xxix). In terms of the diagram presented above, if the researcher is an 'insider' and thus has one foot in the second quarter and the other in the fourth, the tension between the two can be impossible to manage; it is, however, also possible that, if the researcher is a member of the researched community, s/he can act as a bridge between the two. In so doing, the researcher may be able not only to maintain a deep understanding of the community, but also to retain an 'objective' stance through the application of theory and the adoption of a relevant methodology which allows for both distance and involvement. The researcher thus acts as both insider and outsider, embodying the resulting tension in a positive manner which enables constant reflexivity in the movement from inside to outside the community, and back. In so doing, the three accessible 'quarters' are opened up to the researcher and a more holistic study of the community can be undertaken.

Notes

- 1 The 1990s in particular have witnessed an increase in public attention through the medium of television, where 'The Wicca Man' was included in a Channel 4 series on alternative spirituality, *Desperately Seeking Something* (broadcast 25.11.96) and in the Everyman programme *Pagans' Progress*, broadcast on BBC 1 (30.11.97).
- 2 I refer here specifically to the misconstrual of modern witchcraft as Satanism resulting from the theological notion introduced in the sixteenth century that "the essence of witchcraft was adherence to the Devil" (Thomas, 1991: 534). This misunderstanding still persists, and came to light most recently in the ritual abuse cases of the late 1980s and early 1990s.
- 3 In particular, the acceptance of Wicca as an alternative form of religiosity in the modern world is evident in the inclusion of Wiccans at Interfaith meetings.
- 4 See, for example, the collected volumes edited by Harvey and Hardman (1996), Lewis (1996), and Pearson *et al.* (1998). Undergraduate courses which include the study of Paganism and Wicca have been taught at Bath Spa University College, Bristol, King's College, Lampeter, Lancaster, and Winchester. Postgraduate research on Wicca and Paganism is being conducted at all of the above institutions, as well as, for example, at Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education, Goldsmith's College, and the London School of Economics.
- 5 Salomonsen (1996: 42) reports that 1979 is "the year referred to by many of my informants when 'it' all happened: the Goddess movement burst forth in full bloom. The new 'gospel' was being spread through a number of important books and conferences." These publications include Christ & Plaskow, 1979; Stone, 1976; Goldenberg, 1979; Daly, 1978; Adler, 1979; and Starhawk, 1979.
- 6 A term which I avoid here, as 'the Craft' is also used to denote Freemasonry and Druidry.
- 7 No evidence has yet been produced to prove the existence of pre-Gardnerian Wicca, but the claims have often been vehement. Doreen Valiente notes that "the real traditional witches, I have been told, were furious at the behaviour of Gerald Gardner in 'popularizing' the Old Religion and regarded such enterprises as the opening of his museum on the Isle of Man as a disaster" (Valiente, 1989: 85). She further states that she thinks it was Robert Cochrane, who claimed to be a Hereditary witch, who "invented the word 'Gardnerian'—originally as a term of abuse" (*ibid.*: 122), and that Cochrane "frequently expressed hatred of 'Gardnerians' ... [and] relished the prospect of having what he called 'a Night of the Long Knives' with the Gardnerians" (*ibid.*: 129). Valiente produces references to newspaper articles which back up her recollections of division and denigration between traditional and Gardnerian witches in the 1960s (*ibid.*: 130–132).
- 8 Orion (1995: 143) lists several differences, including a less formal and hierarchical ritual style which is more inventive and celebratory, Native American influences, such as shamanism and drumming, the superimposition of psychotherapy onto Wicca, and the application of Wicca to political activism.

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- 9 Salomonsen (1996: 33) further points out that the Goddess Movement does not associate itself with the occult, magical tradition or with Paganism; "[a]lthough Neopagan men (and women) may worship the Goddess, women in the Goddess Movement do not regard them as feminists".
- 10 I use here as specific examples Evans Pritchard, 1976, and Ginzburg, 1992.
- 11 Although the burgeoning interest in hedgewitchcraft led to the formation of the Association of Solitary Hedgewitches (ASH) in 1994, it operates as a contact organization only. Solitary hedgewitches can use the association to make contact with each other in order to share experiences and ideas.
- 12 Hutton states that cunning folk are "increasingly significant as role models now that the individual practice of witchcraft is coming into ever greater vogue, but they have little relation to the essentially communal character of mid twentieth century paganism" (Hutton 1996: 6-7).
- 13 Comment by Chas Clifton (clifton@usc Colo.edu), February 1999. E-mail contribution to the Nature Religion Scholars discussion group (natrel-l@usc Colo.edu).
- 14 In 1995, when I was involved in organizing the conference *Nature Religion Today: Paganism, Shamanism and Esotericism in the 1990s*, a colleague suggested inviting Tanya Luhrmann. When I mentioned this to my contact she told me that, if Luhrmann attended the conference, British Wiccans would not support the venture.
- 15 Wicca does not have any formalized rules as such. However, there are commonly accepted and observed rules within the religion, this being one of them.
- 16 Hanegraaff (1995) presents an extensive argument for the importance of empirical data in the study of religion, while emphasizing the requirement that the researcher maintains respect for the world view of believers which "encompasses an empirically perceptible one *and* one or more meta-empirical realms" (Hanegraaff, 1995: 101). See also Patrick (1997: 9) who states that "we are accountable to the multi-level complexity of 'truth' to present as complete and comprehensive an interpretation as possible in the context of broader social and spiritual trends".
- 17 I am grateful to Derek Reinhard who, after chairing a paper I presented on this subject at the Association of University Departments of Theology and Religious Studies (AUDTRS) conference in 1999, pointed out the similarities between my diagram and the Johari Window.
- 18 Inaccurate 'facts' which are known by both the community and the researcher are likely to be stereotypes, such as the 'common knowledge' that all witches are female and have black cats, or that all witches are devil worshippers.
- 19 For further information, see Luft & Ingham, 1955.
- 20 Cf. Jan G. Platvoet (1983: 6) who says that "methods of collecting data and interpreting them have a hermeneutical setting: they are operated in a two-way framework of interpretation intimately linked to the person of the investigator and necessarily involving his or her subjectivities in their operation".

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