

CASE STUDY

Researching radical religions

When conducting research on millenarian movements (or radical religions) in Italy, Cardano constructed three different types of sample: purposive, snowball and quota:

The interview plan was drawn up and implemented in different ways in the two millenarian communities, also because of their differing numerical sizes. In the case of the Elfs of *Gran Burrone* . . . I compiled the list of participants to interview with the help of Matteo (an informant) and on the basis of impressions garnered during my first stays in the community . . . At Damanhur, the choice of subjects to interview followed a more complex route. I initially contacted three informants and asked each of them to draw up a list of people whom they thought I should interview . . . I combined these three lists and then made the same request to some of the individuals mentioned by at least two of my informants. This procedure further augmented the list of candidates. From the latter I selected names of interviewees so as to fulfill two requirements: the persons chosen should have social importance as expressed by the frequency of their appearance on the lists; the sample should be balanced in terms of the gender, age and social position of the individuals selected . . . I decided to conduct the next block of interviews by giving voice also to persons with less prominent social roles. I accordingly asked my informants to perform a similar service as before. But this time I imposed certain constraints on the informants which forced them to make their selections according to an elementary 'factorial plan' constructed by jointly considering the age and gender of candidates (1997c: 53-5).

The most disparate of places can be used to conduct the interviews in order to reduce the ethnographer's obtrusiveness, given that it is important to adapt to the participant's everyday routines. Cardano recalls:

I conducted many of my interviews while the informants were doing their housework, cooking, washing clothes or looking after their children. Some interviews took place while traveling from one settlement to the next, others amid the din of a party, yet others in the shade of a tree during 'siesta' (1997c: 55).