

---

Carole M. Cusack and Rachelle Scott

## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

---

**Carole M. Cusack** is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Sydney. She trained as a medievalist and her doctorate was published as *Conversion Among the Germanic Peoples* (Cassell, 1998). Since the late 1990s she has taught in contemporary religious trends. She is the author of *Invented Religions: Imagination, Fiction and Faith* (Ashgate, 2010).

**Rachelle Scott** studies the history of Theravada Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia, with an emphasis on contemporary Buddhism in Thailand. Her first book, *Nirvana for Sale?: Buddhism, Wealth, and the Dhammakāya Temple* (SUNY, 2009), examined contemporary debates over monastic and lay wealth in Thailand.

Studies in Religion A20  
University of Sydney  
NSW, 2006  
Australia  
[carole.cusack@sydney.edu.au](mailto:carole.cusack@sydney.edu.au)

Department of Religious Studies,  
University of Tennessee,  
Knoxville, TN 37996-0450  
USA  
[rscott@utk.edu](mailto:rscott@utk.edu)

The first issue of *Fieldwork in Religion* for 2017 contains a sparkling collection of research that addresses issues of fieldwork in contexts as diverse as hospitals in Africa, digital environments and non-normative Christian and Other-Than-Human communities, traditional African agricultural festivals, and rituals and performances for local and tourist audiences in the Indonesian island of Bali.

The first contribution is by Chris Greenough (independent scholar). “Queering Fieldwork in Religion: Exploring Life-stories with Non-Normative Christians Online” explores the use of social media including Facebook and Twitter to research the sexual life-stories of Christians who depart from traditional understandings of sexuality and gender. Greenough discusses how online and offline identities differ, and is frank about the advantages and disadvantages of recruiting and interviewing in the digital space. On the one hand, he received intimate details that might not have so easily arisen in a traditional interview; on the other, it was difficult to analyse the interviews without the accompaniments of voice tone, bodily gesture, and so on that are part of a person-to-person interaction in

the “real world.” Greenough also ruminates on what a queer methodology might look like, given that it refuses structured or rigid categories and methods.

The second article is by Jason Bruner (Arizona State University). In “Religion, Medicine and Global Health in Uganda: Reflecting Critically on an Afternoon at Mulago Hospital” Bruner details three interactions that he had at Mulago Hospital in Kampala. These were with the American research director of a large global health NGO, with two nurses on the mental health ward, and with a Pentecostal minister, Pastor David, whose preaching he witnessed. All three encounters gave Bruner different insights into how research on religion and medicine in Uganda might be conducted (despite the first two interlocutors denying the possibility of realizing such a project, and Pastor David advocating faith in Jesus as healer), and what sort of conclusions could be drawn from such a study.

The next article, “Rangda and the Goddess Durga in Bali,” is by Sarah Weiss (Yale-NUS College, Singapore), and concerns the witch Rangda, the opponent of the village guardian spirit, the Barong, in Bali. Weiss interrogates how the Hindu goddess Durga has come to be associated with Rangda, and her evidence includes the *Calon Arang* text, and popular performances for tourists that dramatize excerpts from mythology. In Indian mythology and religious worship Durga is a champion of the gods who slaughters the demon Mahishasura; she then creates Kali as a result. Weiss argues that Rangda has many of the attributes of Kali in Bali, and in her conflict with Barong she assists in maintaining cosmic balance and bringing evil spirits closer to a state of ritual purity. This is because the victory of the Barong temporarily restores the world.

The fourth contribution is Kayode Joseph Onipede’s (Ladoke Agintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Nigeria) “Festival, Identity and Social Integration: A Study of the New Yam Festival in Otun-Ekiti, Southwest Nigeria.” This fascinating research involved participant observation at the New Yam Festival celebrations in the sixteen communities of the Moba kingdom of southwest Nigeria in July of 2012. The central role of the yam as staple food means that the festival is critically important in ensuring the wellbeing of the people and in cementing community ties and strengthening their sense of shared identity. The differing elements of the festival, including sacrifice of a goat, the Awo market, the worship of Ogun, and the Atapo rites directed towards those blessed by being mothers, are described vividly.

The final article is by Venetia Laura Delano Robertson (University of Sydney), and returns the focus to online research. “Navigating Other-Than-Human Identities with Online Ethnography” is a study of Robertson’s research process throughout her doctoral candidature and her interactions with the Otherkin and Therianthropology communities through both digital “lurking” and surveys and

interviews. Robertson also provides a valuable sketch of popular and academic publications on Otherkin and Therianthropy, and explains how the online groups have refined and redescribed identity over the years in reaction to media scandals, and apostasy on the part of spokespeople (most notably Lupa, author of *A Field Guide to the Otherkin* [2007]). She comments on the difficulties of online postings as primary sources, and ethical issues in online research.

Our thanks are due to the referees who provided feedback on the five research articles. We are grateful also to George Chryssides, the journal's review editor, for the book reviews. We acknowledge the invaluable assistance of the staff at Equinox Publishing, and also of Sarah Norman, *Fieldwork in Religion's* excellent production editor.