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Christopher Partridge and Ron Geaves
University College, Chester

Editors' Introduction

A warm welcome to the first issue of *Fieldwork in Religion*. For some years now the editors, and many others who study contemporary religious belief and practice, have been aware of the need for a specialized avenue for the publication of empirical research. *Fieldwork in Religion* is an international, peer-reviewed journal that will not only fill this gap, but will also encourage such research from a range of perspectives and disciplines. That is to say, this is not a journal narrowly focused on ethnography or the anthropology of religion. Although we are certainly keen to publish research from anthropologists and ethnographers, an important function of the journal is to promote interdisciplinarity in the empirical study of religion. Hence, whether one is researching indigenous religions, world faiths, new religions and alternative spiritualities, or, indeed, the religious significance of contemporary popular culture, *Fieldwork in Religion* will become an invaluable source of scholarship. To take, for example, the study of subcultures, countercultures, and popular culture, this is a growing area of academic analysis within the study of contemporary religion, and one in which we intend the journal to fully engage.

Furthermore, as well as particular empirical studies of religion, the journal aims to promote good practice in fieldwork by publishing studies of particular methodologies, discussions of problems encountered by scholars, and analyses of the ethical issues raised during fieldwork. For example, Sophie Gilliat-Ray's fine study in this issue examines the unsuccessful efforts made by her to negotiate research access to four Deobandi *dar ul-uloom* in Britain. She provides an insightful discussion of how such rejection might be interpreted, with reference to the history of the *dar ul-uloom*, the nature of the setting, the current socio-political climate, and the anathematizing of such fieldwork by the authorities of the *dar ul-uloom*. However, as she argues, the denial of access and the critique of ethnographic research provide significant 'data' in itself. Hence, this discussion is an excellent example of what we are seeking to

encourage in *Fieldwork in Religion*. On the one hand, it is interdisciplinary, in that it is clearly developed with reference to sociology, anthropology, and ethnography, and, on the other hand, it posits strategies that researchers might employ to overcome difficulties.

Similarly, the breadth of empirical research we seek to encourage is further indicated in James Cox's fascinating analysis of the religious dimensions of the current land crisis in Zimbabwe. He shows that a direct connection can be drawn between traditional beliefs and practices (particularly those involving spirit mediums and ancestor spirits) and the land resettlement programme. This connection, which is encouraged by the current regime led by President Robert Mugabe and linked to the aims of the war veterans, is increasingly expressed in an anti-white, anti-colonial rhetoric through official government channels.

Two very different, but equally thorough and informative studies of mainstream contemporary Christian belief and practice are provided by Stephen Hunt (from a sociological perspective) and a team from the University of Bangor, UK, led by Leslie Francis (from a psychological perspective). Both are well known for their research in the areas on which they have written. The latter study by the team from Bangor University is a revealing examination of evangelical lay church leaders, using psychological type theory—a method of understanding and identifying personality preferences. This type of empirical research is quite different from that of the first two articles, but is, nevertheless, useful in the excavation of data that helps us to understand the personality types drawn to particular forms of religious leadership. Interestingly, the team found that both male and female evangelical lay church leaders differ from the UK population as a whole, in that, most notably, intuitive types are significantly over-represented.

Stephen Hunt's thoughtful article examines the same Christian tradition (i.e. Evangelicalism), in that it focuses on the enormously successful *Alpha* programme, which is used missiologically by many churches in the UK. In some ways, this study is similar to Gilliat-Ray's in that it is methodologically focused. As well as introducing the reader to *Alpha* and discussing those who are attracted to the programme and why, it also provides an overview of the empirical methods used during his national survey in the UK, some of the problems encountered, and some of the limitations of the methods used.

Even if there is not quite something for everyone in this issue, it is hoped that the breadth and level of research represented here will be of interest to many scholars of religion.