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).


The second issue of Fieldwork in Religion for 2021 has a truly international selection, with six research articles from scholars based in Israel, Norway, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria and Australia. The authors investigate fieldwork in multiple innovative contexts including LGBTQI Jewish congregations, Greek Orthodox devotion to the Virgin Mary on the island of Tinos, religious responses and adaptations during the current COVID-19 pandemic, the syncretistic religious practices of the Semelai Orang Asli Muslims in Malaysia, traditional Yoruba festivals, and religious and touristic pilgrimage trails in contemporary Britain.

The first contribution by Elazar Ben Lulu (Ariel University, Israel) is titled “Ethnography of the Sh’ma Yisrael Prayer: A Jewish Performance of Gender and Queer Introspection”. This research analyses how in Reform Jewish congregations the solemn Sh’mi Yisrael prayer, which is a profound statement of faith in God (and crucial to Conservative, Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox congregations as well) has been reframed to function as a call for gender equality and the recognition and empowerment of LGBTQI Jews.

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The second article, “Religious Syncretism among the Semelai Orang Asli Muslims in Sungai Lui Village, Malaysia”, by Ros Aiza Mohd Mokhtar (Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia), Abd Hakim Mohad, Mohd Azhar Ibrahim Residi, Khadijah Muda and Siti Nor Azhani Mohd Tohar, is an examination of one of the indigenous groups in Malaysia, the Orang Asli, with a view to investigating the type of Islamic practices that are common among marginal peoples. This research study is original as the usual focus is on animist spiritual beliefs and pre-Islamic practices.

Next is “Going Around and Connecting Dots? Landscape, Monuments and Pilgrimage Tourism in Celtic Britain”, by Jonathan Wooding (University of Sydney). He examines the recent creation of pilgrimage trails in the United Kingdom that are frequently named after saints, and he makes connections between a range of historical and geographical sites that are often historically dubious. The scholarly examination of such claims, Wooding avers, will contribute to both the diversification of visitor experiences along pilgrimage trails, and the impact of religious history on economic and social conditions of participant local communities.

The fourth article, “Ode Festival: Cultural Expression, Identity and Social Solidarity in Oye-Ekiti, Southwest Nigeria” is by Kayode Onipede and O. F. Phillips (Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Nigeria). The Ode festival is dedicated to the worship of the Obalatan deity in Oyo-Ekiti, and Onipede and Phillips focus on the way that this festival shapes individual and community identity for participants, and how, while it connects the community to its past and traditions, it may have a role to play in the future.

The fifth article is by Evy Johanne Håland (independent scholar, Norway), and is titled “Fieldwork and Ancient Sources: A Comparative Method for Healing Rituals”. The methodology employed compares the female dominated, orally transmitted accounts of pilgrims to the shrine of the Panagia (Virgin Mary) on the Greek island of Tinos with male-authored texts from antiquity that describe pilgrimages to the shrines of the ancient Greek gods.

The final contribution, “COVID-19: New Normal and New Procedures of Worship in Indonesia”, by Ridwan Ridwan and Muhammad Fuad Zain (State Islamic University, Purwokerto, Indonesia), examines the flexibility of Islamic law in Indonesia when faced with pandemic restrictions on communal worship. The authors’ analysis of the fatwas of the Indonesian Ulama Council is fascinating and demonstrates adaptability in the face of disaster.

It is wonderful to complete my sixth year as co-editor of Fieldwork in Religion with Rachelle Scott with such a cosmopolitan and wide-ranging collection of articles. Rachelle Scott and I thank the referees who provided feedback on the six research articles. We are very grateful to George Chryssides, Fieldwork in Religion’s review editor, too. We acknowledge the assistance of the staff at Equinox Publishing, and of Sarah Norman, production editor nonpareil.