
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).

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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 Press, 2009), examined contemporary debates over monastic and lay wealth in Thailand.

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The first issue of *Fieldwork in Religion* for 2023 contains six research articles that all address issues in the fieldwork process, as well as exploring various contemporary religious phenomena, and how they are located in the wider academic study of religion.

The first article is by Matteo Di Placido (University of Turin), Anna Strhan (University of York), and Stefania Palmisano (University of Turin) and is titled “Modern Postural Yoga and the *Health-Spirituality-Neoliberalism Nexus*”. It is an analysis of individualistic contemporary Western spiritual seekers’ engagement with the modern postural form of yoga exported from India to the West in the twentieth century. Di Placido, Strhan, and Palmisano unpack the complex entanglements of yoga with consumer capitalism, self-directed healthcare, spiritual fulfilment, and a range of other phenomena they have grouped under the term “the *Health-Spirituality-Neoliberalism Nexus*”.

The second contribution, “Christianity Without Christ: Researching Christian Mythicists”, is by Christopher M. Hansen (Saginaw Valley State University). This

is an historical study that focuses on a neglected intellectual trend in modernity, Christian mythicism (the idea that Jesus did not exist, but rather was a mythic figure). Mythicist Christians are rejected by mainstream Christianity as heretics, and are of little interest to atheists and secularists, who tend to regard researching religious leaders as otiose. Hansen's research focuses on Eliza Sharples and Thomas L. Brodie, a nineteenth-century feminist and a twentieth-century Catholic priest, both of whom espoused mythicism.

The next article, "Life's Meaning and Religion in Contemporary Europe: The Case of Slovenia", by Matija Kržan (Marmara University) is an empirical study of the interrelationship between religiosity and meaning in the life of contemporary Slovenes. Kržan reviews the historical role of religion in Slovenia, then analyses the results of a survey measuring seven types of meaning in life. It is concluded that religious institutions are in retreat as determiners of meaning for individualists in the twenty-first century, but that an interest in spirituality is evident among Slovenes, and plays a significant part in crafting meaning in life.

The fourth article, "The CRETA Project: Embracing a New Religious Paradigm. An Italian Feminist Participatory Research Study in the Light of Modern Matriarchal Studies", is by Alessandra Piccoli (Free University of Bolsano-Bozen), Andrea Fleckinger (University of Trento), and Angela Chiavassa (independent scholar, Italy). This fascinating research reports on the establishment of CRETA (participatory construction of egalitarian societies), a two-year project that worked practically to create an egalitarian community that was inspired by gender equality, immanent divinity, and a cyclical worldview (the basic principles of goddess worship and matriarchal society). Ecofeminism and the development of new rituals and spiritual practices were also important.

The fifth article is by Hisanori Kato (Chuo University), and is titled "De-Radicalization of Former Terrorists: The Case of Indonesia". Kato explains and critiques the de-radicalization programmes currently on offer in Indonesia, and includes the voices of former terrorists, which is an especially valuable part of his research. The contemporary situation is illuminated by a brief historical examination of the process of establishing a democratic government, and the identification of groups that perceived themselves as outside that projected society, and which consequently developed grudges that crystallized around the proper practice of Islam and its role in the contemporary world.

The final article is "Religious Orientation and Motivations in a Sample of Italian Catholic Volunteers" by Daniela Acquadro Maran (University of Turin) and Maurizio Tirassa (University of Turin). This survey-based study investigates the importance of religiosity among 160 volunteers in a north Italian city. The authors are concerned to establish whether intrinsic religious orientation was linked to

an altruistic and humanitarian motivation to volunteer; whether an extrinsic religious orientation was linked to a career motivation to volunteer; and whether there were identifiable gender differences in motivations to volunteer among their sample.

My co-editor Rachelle Scott and I thank the anonymous referees who provided feedback on the six original articles. Although this issue of *Fieldwork in Religion* does not feature any book reviews, Rachelle and I are delighted to welcome Alex Fry (Bournemouth University), the new Reviews Editor, to the *FIR* team. We acknowledge the support of the staff at Equinox Publishing, and also of Sarah Norman, *Fieldwork in Religion's* brilliant production editor.