Carole M. Cusack

EDITOR’S 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).

This issue of *Fieldwork in Religion* marks the end of my eight-year term as co-Editor with Rachelle Scott. The sixteen issues I have been part of represent a vast array of diverse research from academics working around the world, all of which illuminated the fascinating subject of how to do fieldwork in and about religion. There were five special issues during my tenure, including one double special issue. These were: Vol. 11, No. 1 (2016) on “G. I. Gurdjieff and the Work”, edited by Carole M. Cusack (University of Sydney); Vol. 12, No. 2 (2017) on “Ethics and Fieldwork”, edited by *Fieldwork in Religion*’s then Review Editor George Chryssides (University of Birmingham); and Vol. 13, No. 1 (2018) on “Spiritual Tourism”, edited by Alex Norman (Western Sydney University). These three issues were followed by: Vol. 15, Nos. 1–2 (2020) on “Shifting Sites, Shifting Selves: The Intersections of Homes and Fields in the Ethnography of India”, edited by Amy L. Allocco (Elon University, NC) and Jennifer D. Ortegren (Middlebury College, VT); and Vol. 17, No. 1 (2022) on “Critical Terms for the Ethnography of Religion”, edited by Brendan Jamal Thornton (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill) and Eric Hoenes del Pinal (University of North Carolina, Charlotte). The special issues are opportunities to do broad and deep research on a single topic, or thematic/methodological issue.

Across the full sixteen issues, we published eighty-seven research articles and one review article. The authors of these articles were from many countries: the United States of America (25); Australia (22); the United Kingdom (15); Italy (14);
Indonesia (6); Poland (5); Malaysia (5); Japan (3); Nigeria (3); Norway (2); the Netherlands (2); Thailand (2); Germany (1); Singapore (1); the Philippines (1); Egypt (1); Morocco (1); Namibia (1); Bosnia-Herzegovina (1); Israel (1); Ghana (1); Canada (1); Finland (1); Turkey (1); Ireland (1); and China (1). These 118 authors came from twenty-eight different countries (the UK total divides into England, Scotland and Wales), and five different continents (Europe, Asia, Australia, North America and Africa). Rachelle and I were delighted by the diversity of submissions we received but remain aware of the deficiencies in Fieldwork in Religion submissions: there are no published outcomes from South America to date, and Europe, North America and Australia dominate (which is not surprising with one editor based in America and the other in Australia), with total published articles from Asia and Africa trailing behind. In terms of sex, the 118 authors were evenly divided into 58 men and 60 women, a pleasing result that Rachelle and I cannot really claim credit for. Over the eight years, George Chryssides (York St John University) was an integral part of the team, providing 55 book reviews for twelve of the sixteen issues. George retired from the Review Editor position at the end of 2022, and Alex Fry (Bournemouth University) took on the role. He provided the four book reviews in this issue.

The articles in the issue are varied and fascinating. The opening piece by Matteo Di Placido (University of Turin), Stefania Palmisano (University of Turin) and Fiona Timmins (UCD College of Health Sciences), “Institutional, Nurses’ and Patients’ Spiritual Imaginaries Compared: Sociological Notes from the Field”, discusses ways in which the inclusion of spiritual support in modern hospitals could transfer contemporary medical care, including end-of-life care. The second contribution by Giacomo Buoncompagni (University of Florence) is titled “The Perception of Anti-Semitic Hatred in the Italian Media and Justice System” and is a timely study of how the latest instantiation of antisemitism has altered the spread of such ideas, which are now inbricated with conspiracism and facilitated by the internet. The third article is by Marzia Coltri (Arden University, UK), and addresses the Covid-19 pandemic which impacted the world from early 2020. In “Qigong (chee gung) /气(yī)功/gōng/: Transformative Wellbeing and Integrative Therapy Practice” she investigates the impact of lockdowns and isolation on mental health, particularly that of young people, and the value of qigong as a therapy in these circumstances.

The fourth contribution is by ChunXiang Lei (Xinyang Normal University) and Yang Chao (University of Sydney) and addresses “Disease Perception and Social Order in Yi Traditional Ritual Therapy: The Case of the Hongyi Branch in Dashuigou, Maojie, China”. This is an anthropological study that investigates the causes of illness among the Yunnan Hongyi, an indigenous people, which are threefold: the soul; ghosts; and uncleansed objects. The fifth and final article is
by Chompunuch Pongjit (Mahidol University International College, Thailand) and Ruchi Agarwal (Mahidol University International College, Thailand), and is titled “Spiritual Folklore Tourism: Tourists’ Experience at Naga Cave in Thailand”. This research considers contemporary spiritual tourism in Thailand by surveying pilgrim tourists to the Naga Cave during the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is a source of great pride to me to be leaving Fieldwork in Religion on such a high note. In the past eight years, this issue contains the only work by Thai scholars, and the first article co-written by a Chinese scholar.

My thanks are due: first to Rachelle Scott (University of Tennessee, Knoxville) who has been a courteous, companionable and constructive co-Editor; and second to George Chryssides, a good friend and invaluable colleague, who served Fieldwork in Religion as a referee for so many articles and a sounding board for special issue proposals (and as an editor and author), as well as by giving us book reviews. I am thankful to all the referees who provided feedback on the research articles over the past eight years. I am also grateful to the staff at Equinox Publishing, and cannot praise too highly Sarah Norman, Fieldwork in Religion’s outstanding production editor. It is a great pleasure to announce that Susannah Crockford (University of Exeter) will be my replacement, and that she and Alex Fry represent a new generation of talent that will benefit Fieldwork in Religion for many years into the future. It’s been a wild ride. Now it’s over. Thank you, Janet Joyce, for your confidence in my work and your benevolent oversight of Fieldwork in Religion. I would have thanked my partner Donald Barrett, the best supporter a scholar could ever have (a Latinist and a librarian, perfection). Sadly, he died of complications ensuing from two bouts of double pneumonia on 15 February 2021. It seems fitting that my term as co-Editor with Rachelle ends shortly after his life ended, as that terrible event made it necessary to change my life, to become a different person.

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23 August 2023