

Editorial Introduction: Religion Studies Autobiographies

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This special issue of the *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* is an original and timely contribution to our understanding of Religion Studies and related disciplines in the twenty-first century. It contains ten autobiographical reflections on the experience of being a Religion Studies academic. We invited scholars in Australia and New Zealand to reflect on their academic biography and the intersections with their field of expertise.

The relevance of this exercise is highlighted by the shift in emphasis in the tertiary education sector since the 1980s from traditional Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) to the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) disciplines, and the resultant soul-searching that HASS academics the world over have been engaged with (Robbins 1993). The contemporary world is characterised by materialism, individualism, resurgent right-wing populism and a politics of affect; certain commentators have seen these trends as a direct result of the disempowerment of Humanities cultural critics (Furedi 2004), the corporatisation of higher education institutions (Davidson 2015), and the instrumentalist directing of school, college and university education towards preparedness for the workplace and skills-based training (Vaatstra and de Vries 2007).

The changing institutional location of Religion Studies is one striking feature of the Australian and New Zealand context. Religion Studies departments are few and far between; arguably, in the late twentieth century such departments and centres were more plentiful and better-resourced. Certainly, since the 1980s there has been an expansion of Religion Studies in high schools (Crawford and Rossiter 2006). However, it is worth noting that Religion Studies departments have never been numerous or powerful in Australia; the situation in New Zealand has generally been more positive (Morris 2010), but there have been

challenges in recent years. Admittedly, Religion Studies has always been cross-disciplinary; yet it is a definite trend that scholars are increasingly more likely to be found in History, Sociology, Asian Studies, and other discipline areas.

The intersection of the academic and the personal continues to be a point of both tension and productive innovation. In more established disciplines such as History and English there is a tradition of autobiographical reflection that scholars are enthusiastic to participate in (Davis 2009; Schmertz 2018). These biographies make clear the significance of the personal in the production of creative and innovative academic work. The reflections we commissioned for this special issue are an important contribution to an emergent field across the HASS disciplines, and make for fascinating reading about the vicissitudes of the discipline of Religion Studies in the Antipodes. For more on this topic, see Douglas Ezzy's (2016) reflections on a similar special issue of Pagan Studies autobiographies.

We are both particularly pleased with this special issue. We hope other readers will find it equally engaging and rewarding.

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