

Editorial

The current issue of *Religion and Gender* is the first one that is not a special issue dedicated to a particular topic, but that instead presents two articles in the journal's open section and in addition to that an extensive section of book reviews. We deviate from our standard policy of each issue focussing on a specific theme, partly because the preparation and publication of special issues at times is a complicated process that requires some flexibility in planning, and partly because this enables us to highlight our interest in receiving and publishing free submissions of high quality articles in the field of religion and gender. The two articles presented in this volume certainly make a relevant contribution to the field, and they complement the profile of *Religion and Gender* as an academic journal dedicated to the systematic study of gender and religion in an interdisciplinary perspective.

The opening article "'She read me a prayer and I read it back to her": Gagauz Women, Miraculous Literacy and the Dreaming of Charms', further substantiates the commitment of the journal to take seriously that it is situated in contemporary Europe. In this article, James Kapaló presents a rich ethnographic account on the religious lives, or 'lived religion', of women from a highly marginalised ethnic and religious minority, the Gagauz, in the post-soviet Republic of Moldavia – often cited as the poorest nation of Europe. He specifically examines the polyvalent and gendered nature of the relationship between the practices of reading and charming and the figure of the Mother of God in Gagauz women's dream narratives. Exploring the significance of Mary's 'presence' and transformative power, mediated through the apocryphal legend *The Dream of the Mother of God*, in Gagauz women's everyday lives, Kapaló highlights how these women's dream narratives function to confer legitimacy and authority on the dangerous practices of healing and reading through which they transgress certain patriarchal religious boundaries whilst also confirming their other social roles as mothers, care-givers and domestic providers.

The second article presents an equally rich ethnography-based discussion, but relating to quite a different cultural, religious and gendered context. In 'Narrating Identity: the Employment of Mythological and Literary Narratives in Identity Formation Among the Hijras of India', Jennifer Ung Loh focuses on the *hijras* or *kinnars* in India, a minority group ostracised from mainstream society as a result

of their non-heteronormative gender performances and anatomical presentations. She explores the role of mythological and literary narratives in explaining and legitimising behavioural patterns, ritual practices, and anatomical forms that are specific to hijras, and alleviating some of the stigma surrounding this identity. Her central theoretical argument is that these – mostly oral – narratives, including mythological stories concerning people of ambiguous gender and myths associated with Bahuchara Mata, function ontologically, as they narratively bring hijra identity into being and authenticate such an identity, which is often perceived by mainstream society as 'deviant' and 'different', both sexually and socially. This article illustrates the aim of *Religion and Gender* to investigate gender at the intersection of sexuality and diversity studies, among others fields. The two articles together demonstrate the richness of empirical and theoretical insights that detailed readings and interpretations of particular identity practices in specific local contexts bring to the understanding of the complex configurations of gender and religion in the contemporary world.

The breadth of the scope of *Religion and Gender* and the many intersections that the journal seeks to explore become further visible in the book review section that presents sixteen reviews of recently published books related to the field. You are encouraged not only to read these reviews but also to suggest titles of new books deserving review in the journal and/or to volunteer reviewing a book for the journal yourself. Please do not hesitate to contact the book review editors, Nella van den Brandt (hendrikapetronella.vandenbrandt@ugent.be) and An Van Raemdonck (an.vanraemdonck@ugent.be). Let us also make use of this opportunity to invite you to submit your original research articles, as well as literature surveys, concise discussion papers, and announcements of academic events, to the journal through the online submission system on the website, www.religionandgender.org.

The next issue of *Religion and Gender* will, in line with our general policy, be a special issue again, exploring the intersections of gender, political protest and religious culture in the case of Pussy Riot that recently has made international headlines. Other forthcoming special issues, currently under preparation, are on gender and secularisation, and religion, gender and visual culture. We are always open to receive innovative proposals for other special issues on topical themes or theoretical questions, for which you can contact the managing editor, Adriaan van Klinken (a.vanKlinken@leeds.ac.uk). For now, we trust you will enjoy reading the content presented in the current issue.