

Editorial

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Even in alternative disciplines such as New Age studies, it seems, orthodox traditions can come to dominate. Such is the claim in this volume of *JASANAS* of Julia Iwersen and Marty Laubach, in relation to each of their distinctive presentations on the epistemology of esotericism; and of Christina Welch, in relation to the cultural appropriation of Native American Indian traditions. Joseph Gelfer, by re-evaluating as “sacramental” what is often castigated as “substance abuse” also challenges mainstream scholarship.

The year 2008 will be the thirtieth anniversary of the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*. Said famously lamented the institutionalisation of clichéd ideal types in the study of what was then known as the Orient – which he revealed as a quasi-geographical essentialist generalisation. Yet even Said could not have predicted the terrible consequences such mutual misunderstandings would have on 9/11 and in the “War on Terror”.

In a discipline such as ours, that did not exist until the late 1980s, it may seem surprising that several scholars already feel marginalised in a somewhat similar way, by colleagues established in the same, relatively narrow, field. Has unthinking traditionalism really taken hold in the study of alternative spiritualities? How can it be tempered?

Listening to scholars from around the world is crucial. The international aspect has been evident from the first *ASANAS* conference in 2003, and a forthcoming volume of *JASANAS* focusing specifically on New Age in global contexts is in preparation. Genuine debate can also temper dominant traditions. *JASANAS* is published independently, and can avoid some of the inherent confines of a large publishing house. The “*ASANAS Positions*” section of the *Journal* offers scholars and scholarly practitioners a soap-box to air their views. *JASANAS* also showcases research notes from recent post-graduate theses, disseminating new ideas before they are constricted by the channels of career advancement.

Certainly, New Age studies may not yet appear relevant to political or policy decisions in the way that Islamic studies have become. But Orientalism once also seemed to many to be an armchair pursuit of romantic dilettantes. Let us hope, in this sense at least, that the history of New Age scholarship does not become the eternal return of the same.

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