

New Religious Movements: A Bibliographic Introduction

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ABSTRACT This article provides a map to the bibliographic landscape for the academic study of new religious movements (NRMs). The article first considers the development of the scholarly subfield, including debates over the nature of the concept of ‘new religious movement’ and recent scholarship on the nature of this key term, as well as the most salient research areas and concepts. Next, the article introduces the most important bibliographic materials in the subfield: journals focusing on the study of NRMs, textbooks and reference volumes, book series and monographic literature, online resources, and primary sources.

INTRODUCTION

In March 2018, Netflix’s surprise hit documentary six-part mini-series, *Wild Wild Country*, went viral. The series documented the rise and fall of Rajneeshpuram, the communal center of the Rajneesh (Osho) movement in rural Oregon, one of the more infamous of twentieth-century new religious movements. The documentary pulled few punches, detailing the sensational, criminal, and salacious, but emphasizing the words and recollections of ex-members alongside archival footage. The mini-series attracted wide attention after its premier at the Sundance Film Festival and then streaming on Netflix. This included controversy, with the still-existent Osho movement’s leaders accusing the documentarians of a naïve hatchet job, but some ex-members accusing the documentary of not being critical enough. *Wild Wild Country* built on a foundation of similar popular media attention to new religious movements over the previous years, including *Waco: Madman or Messiah* (2018), on the Branch Davidians, *Holy Hell* (2016), on the Buddhafield movement, and *Going Clear* (2015), on Scientology. Outside of the documentary genre, television audiences tuned in for CBS/Paramount’s dramatic mini-series *Waco* (2018) and FX’s season-long *American Horror Story: Cult* (2017). It appears that new religious movements, typically called cults by the general public, are hot.

Scholarship on new religious movements, as academics tend to call such groups for reasons explored in this essay, may not (sadly) have quite the audience of popular media, but the scholarly subfield is no less active. With multiple academic journals dedicated to the study of new religious movements, monograph and anthology book series, and thriving academic conversations within the field of religious studies, it behooves librarians and information specialists to become familiar with the bibliographic landscape of new religious movements. This article provides a map to that landscape, beginning with a consideration of the development of the scholarly subfield, the key research areas and concepts, and finally the relevant bibliographic material.

WHAT ARE NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS?

Just as scholars of religion more broadly continue to debate the definition and boundaries of the constituent term and concept “religion,” academics focusing on new religious movements do the same with “new religious movement.” As Douglas E. Cowan and David G. Bromley write in the introduction to their *Cults and New Religions: A Brief History*, “it should be clear... that the debate over what constitutes a ‘cult’ or ‘new religious movement’ is often highly contested and emotionally charged” (Cowan and Bromley 2015, 1). Indeed, since the term “new religious movement” (NRM) owes its origin to the efforts of scholars in the 1970s to replace the increasingly pejorative terms “cult” and “sect” with a more neutral phrase, the concept of NRM carries with it the baggage of its antecedents (Lewis 2012, 9). It is, in the words of British researcher Elisabeth Arweck, “the least ‘contaminated,’ albeit not an entirely ‘objective’ term” (Arweck

2006, 7). In my many years of ethnographic work among members of new religious movements and anecdotal conversations with members of various groups, I have yet to come across an individual who would claim to belong to a “cult,” and only seldom to a “new religious movement.” Rather, adherents generally refer to these groups as movements, communities, churches, temples, associations, or simply as religions. Just as problematically, opponents of such groups, those associated with anti-cult movements, generally identify the term “new religious movements” with sociologists of religion that they accuse of taking the side of the cults, and therefore dismiss as “cult apologists.” New religious movement and cult are therefore second order terms, with all the problematic issues that relate to that usage, as Jonathan Z. Smith has similarly noted about the term “religion” itself (Smith 1998, 269–84). Further complicating matters, scholars sometimes employ the term “new religion” as synonymous with “new religious movement.” While there are technical differences between religious movements and religions—the former are more diffuse and can be embedded within larger religious organizations, whereas the latter tend towards more formal standalone organizations—scholarship has tended to lump together all these terms and categories.

But what is a NRM? Generally, scholars consider religious movements to be NRMs if they are within their first several generations of emergence, and especially if they are in some degree of tension with their surrounding culture or with the religious communities out of which they emerged, or are seen by outsiders in some way as deviant or alternative. But this remains a contentious issue, and formally defining what counts as a cult or new religion is in many ways a fruitless endeavor. Rebecca Moore (2020), one of the founders of the field of new religious movement studies, recently noted that attempts to define the nature of “new religious movements” have not substantially changed from initial print symposia debates in 2004–2005 amongst the first generation of scholars in the field, J. Gordon Melton (2004), David Bromley (2004), Thomas Robbins (2005), and Eileen Barker (2004). All four of these formative researchers into NRMs, and Moore as well, concur that a constellation of qualities mark a group as a new religious movement, including being relegated to outsider status (Melton), weak cultural and social alignment (Bromley), social marginalization and/or religious novelty (Robbins), and newness or religious innovation (Barker).

Further, the study of NRMs itself must be situated within the rise of the first group of religions to be called NRMs. Scholars of twentieth-century Japanese religion were the first to use the term in an analytic mode. Horace Neill McFarland (1967) is often credited with popularizing the term *shin shukyo* (“new religions”) in his *The Rush Hour of the Gods: A Study of the New Religious Movements in Japan*, a dated but seminal book on such groups. Melton (2018), responding in a recent essay collection on pre-modern NRMs, argued that the field owes its origin to a specific historical moment, the American counterculture.

It is to be remembered that our sub-discipline really dates from the seemingly sudden emergence of a number of new religions at the end of the 1960s. ... We began with the idea that new religions represented a unique phenomenon signaling essential change in American (and Western) culture in the 1960s, and for a while we defined new religions as those new and alternative spiritual groups founded after 1960. We soon dropped that emphasis... We have at the same time made an effort to acknowledge the new religious movements in Asia and Africa. Now we are being asked to extend our vision backwards to earlier centuries (Melton 2018, 89).

With clear ramifications in terms of the bibliographic treatment of the topic, the concept and term of “new religious movement” has therefore been projected backwards and is now used by scholars to examine religious groups in a variety of earlier and non-Western contexts, making “NRM” not simply a category of recently-emerged religions, but a category that can be used historically and cross-culturally to examine different movements.¹ Effectively, all religions can be studied under the rubric of NRM studies, since all religions were once new. Likewise, the theoretical models drawn from the study of new religions can be usefully applied to analyze and contextualize any religion during its formative era. One might deploy concepts of “charisma,” for example, to understand the rise of Buddhism or Christianity. Sociologist of contemporary religion Rodney Stark (1997) makes just such a move in his book on the rise of ancient Christianity, employing his rational choice model of religious change and NRM formation to first- and second-century Christianity. The literature on NRMs vastly expands if one adopts such a broad view of what constitutes the term and applies NRM scholarship to ancient, pre-modern, or early modern

movements. It also demonstrates the need for scholars and librarians specializing in multiple fields to take seriously research on new religious movements.

Sociologists of religion such as Stark founded the field of new religious movement studies, and many of the foundational concepts animating the study of NRMs emerge from sociology of religion. This includes most notably the concept of charisma, dependent on the model and approach of German sociologist Max Weber and his later interpreters, conversion and apostasy, and debates over the nature of what can be called either socialization or brainwashing, depending on one's perspective. After decades of empirical research, scholars of new religions have nearly unanimously rejected brainwashing theories as unscientific and unempirical, yet they remain in vogue among some psychologists of religion, anti-cultists, and the media (Richardson 1993, 75–97). More recently, humanities-oriented religious studies scholars, including historians of religion and cultural studies specialists, have risen to prominence in the field, though sociologists remain involved as well. Ethnographic and textual studies of specific new religions have proliferated. Most of these publications are either journal articles printed within, or books reviewed by, a small number of journals noted below, so it is still possible for a collection to include the most important and salient publications by following just a handful of journals.

Research is also slowly moving beyond what David Feltmate (2016) has called the “social problems paradigm” assumed by the first generation of NRMs and the scholarship considering them, with its focus on debates over brainwashing, cultic violence, and charismatic leadership. Feltmate calls for understanding NRMs as experiments in “social possibility” rather than indicative of social problems, and recent scholarship has moved in that direction (Feltmate 2016, 95). Joseph Laycock's (2020) newest book on the Satanic Temple, for example, approaches this controversial group not in terms of a social problem, but what it says about American culture and debates over religious freedom and tolerance. One ramification of this new development is that recent work on NRMs is likely to be published outside of the traditional venues for NRM scholarship, since researchers seek to challenge the dominant paradigm and connect the topic to new subfields within religion.

To complicate matters further, several related subfields of religious studies have emerged from out of, or in conversation with, new religious movement studies. In many cases, bibliographic materials related to these subfields cannot be easily distinguished from those of NRM studies. Specifically, Pagan Studies and Western Esotericism Studies have recently established themselves as distinct subfields with journals, conferences, mailing lists, and other forms of institutionalization. Yet the lines are hazy, and scholars of new religions often continue to research and write on Neo-Pagan and Esotericist movements and concepts, for example the Neo-Pagan traditions of Wicca and Odinism, or Esotericist movements like Rosicrucianism and Scientology. Additionally, as noted above, NRM scholars also study the earlier historical periods of groups that were the “old new religions” in earlier eras, often the nineteenth century. Hence, NRMs scholars might research material on the early Latter-day Saint tradition that falls within both NRM studies and Mormon studies.

JOURNALS

The longest running and most notable journal within the subfield of new religious movement studies is the North American-based *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* (disclosure: I serve as co-general editor of *Nova Religio*), which began in 1997 and has published articles by nearly every notable scholar of new religious movements. It currently prints four issues per year. Its early issues contain formative essays establishing major topics in the field, still of relevance today, and frequently cited as such. These earliest issues include such treatments as Thomas Robbins (1997) on the link between new religious movements and violence; a debate between Benjamin D. Zablocki (1997, 1998) and David G. Bromley (1998) on brainwashing, conversion, and thought reform; a print symposium on the “cult wars” and academic neutrality (*Nova Religio Symposium* 1998); Jayne Docherty (1999) on new religions, scholars, and law enforcement; and Lorne L. Dawson (1999) on charisma, prophecy, and failed prophecy.

These fundamental topics, such as charisma, brainwashing, violence, (failed) prophecy, and the relationship between new religious movements, scholars, and the state apparatus remain central issues in contemporary research on NRMs, and despite their age, the journal's backlist still offers scholarly value.

Nova Religio has, in the past decade, increasingly featured one or two special issues each year focusing on a single theme, and curated to include four or more articles with diverse perspectives written by increasingly diverse authors, including international authors and junior scholars. Recent topics include special issues on archaeology and new religions; comparative practices involving new religious movements and food; nineteenth-century religions as NRMs; Marian apparition movements; and a reassessment of scholarship and the legacy of the Peoples Temple and Jonestown. Some issues also include Perspective Essays—short articles on relevant topics not necessarily based on empirical research but often highly useful to scholars or students, since they engage major topics in the field.

Like other journals focusing on the study of NRMs (see below), *Nova Religio* covers a rather broad set of traditions and topics. To quote a recent analysis of the journal's content by co-general editor Catherine Wessinger (2019), the journal focuses on “new religions; new movements within established religious traditions; neo-indigenous, neo-polytheistic and revival movements; ancient wisdom and New Age groups; diasporic religious movements; and marginalized and stigmatized religions.” The past decade has seen *Nova Religio* increasingly turn its attention to new religious movements outside of the recent North American context, in keeping with the pattern previously noted by Melton. (Though it should be noted that *Nova Religio*'s editors and authors are primarily American and Canadian.) At the time of this writing, the most recent issue (23, no. 3) contains treatments of European feminist New Age practices, the Brazilian esoteric movement Vale do Amanhecer (Valley of the Dawn), an analysis of American Jungian psychedelic proponent Terence McKenna, and the American environmental religion / protest movement the Church of Stop Shopping. Simultaneously, the journal maintains its interest in the new religions whose notoriety first attracted the attention of scholars of religion and birthed the subfield. In addition to the previously noted special issue reexamining the Peoples Temple forty years after the deaths at Jonestown, other recent issues have considered the Hare Krishna movement, Scientology, and other well-known new religions.

Scholars have also more recently started several new journals dedicated to the study of NRMs. The *International Journal for the Study of New Religions (IJSNR)*, originally founded in 2010 by Australian scholar Carole M. Cusack and Swedish scholar Liselotte Frisk, has, since its inception, taken an intentionally global perspective on the study of new religions (disclosure: I serve on the editorial board of the *IJSNR*). Like *Nova Religio*, *IJSNR* employs what its founding editors call a “broad definition” of the concept of NRM. Writing in the inaugural issue, Cusack and Frisk indicate that the *IJSNR* publishes articles not only on “the narrow sense [of] ‘new religious movements’... [but also on] older religious movements ... which are ‘new’ in a specific historical context” as well as those outside the West and less organized new spiritual expressions and movements (Cusack and Frisk 2010, 2). The *IJSNR* publishes between one and two issues per year, and is now in its ninth volume. Articles published in the *IJSNR* cover much of the same ground as those in *Nova Religio*, but tend to be authored primarily by European scholars and often have a European focus. Most of the articles published in the *IJSNR* also tend to look at contemporary or near-contemporary NRMs, as opposed to the historical treatments that one sometimes finds in *Nova Religio*.

Founded in 2017 by Massimo Introvigne, a notable Italian scholar of NRMs, *The Journal of CESNUR* is the most recent entry to the journals sector of the subfield of new religious movement studies. Unlike *Nova Religio* and *The International Journal for the Study of New Religions*, *The Journal of CESNUR* is open access and occasionally publishes in languages other than English. Associated with the Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR) in Turin, Italy, the journal has a strong pipeline of papers given at the yearly CESNUR annual conferences, which are the largest annual gatherings of scholars working in the field of new religions and certainly the most international in orientation. *The Journal of CESNUR* (2020) markets itself as appealing to a broad audience by means of its open access policy. The journal was too recently founded to permit detailed analysis of its typical coverage, having only been publishing for two years

of operation at the time of this writing. Yet a consideration of even this limited body of content shows that *The Journal of CESNUR* has tended to disproportionately publish articles focusing on new religious movements in East Asia (Japan, Korea, China). Given that CESNUR founder and lead editor Introvigne's recent research has focused on NRMs in those regions, as have the research agendas of several members of the journal's editorial board, *The Journal of CESNUR* will likely continue to offer articles focusing on such topics. Because CESNUR's conferences often include international scholars and especially European and Asian scholars of new religions, its journal likely will draw from the scholarship produced in those regions. As an open access journal, librarians need to do little to ensure access to this new journal other than maintain an internet connection.

Somewhat lesser known than the other three journals, the online-only, subscription-based *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review (ASRR)* began in 2010 with a mission to publish review essays and book reviews on NRMs, but within two years of its origin began publishing articles as well. Articles tend to cover the same groups and topics as in the other journals. Because *ASRR* is not indexed in EBSCO/Academic Search Complete, JSTOR, or several other major databases—though it is cataloged in the ATLA RDB and ATLAS databases—*ASRR* has a much narrower public profile and readership. Nevertheless, its content should be considered in terms of bibliographic resources for the study of new religious movements.

TEXTBOOKS AND REFERENCE VOLUMES

Anecdotal evidence points to new religious movements as a growing topic of interest for undergraduate courses, and publishers have released several textbooks that provide value as summaries of the state of the field and as bibliographic tools themselves. The most notable of these are Lorne L. Dawson's (2006) *Comprehending Cults: The Sociology of New Religious Movements*, Paul Oliver's (2012) *New Religious Movements: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Douglas E. Cowan and David G. Bromley's (2015) *Cults and New Religions: A Brief History*, and Elijah Siegler's (2007) *New Religious Movements*.

Dawson's (2006) book, as one might expect from the title, focuses on sociological concerns involving new religious movements, such as church-sect typologies, conversion models, brainwashing claims, and questions of social deviance. Although not a reference book, its chapters can individually function as such. Oliver's (2012) book, part of the Continuum (now Bloomsbury) "Guides for the Perplexed" series, offers a succinct introduction to philosophical, psychological, historical, and sociological themes in the study of NRMs, as well as a brief overview of major new groups that emerged from within or are otherwise associated with Hinduism, Christianity, and Buddhism, as well as what the author labels as syncretistic movements. The other two books are more topical. Cowan and Bromley (2015) introduce readers to NRMs by way of chapters on specific new religious traditions (Scientology, Transcendental Meditation, Ramtha, Unification Church, Children of God, Branch Davidians, Heaven's Gate, and Wicca), and some introductory and concluding framing matter. Siegler looks to traditions (Esotericism, Islam) and geographic locations (Asian missions in the West, East Asia, Africa).

Among other textbooks, Hugh B. Urban's (2015) *New Age, Neopagan, and New Religious Movements: Alternative Spirituality in Contemporary America* has a more narrow scope than earlier works, but is much more recent. Like the Cowan and Bromley (2015) book, Urban's (2015) volume focuses on specific new religious movements, including thirteen of them plus an introductory chapter. It is part textbook and part reference book. All of these are worthwhile library additions, especially those more recently published.

Reference books provide another avenue for introductory students, bibliographic support, and of course scholarly reference needs. Most major publishing houses associated with reference series have published books on the topics of new religious movements. James R. Lewis's (2008) *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements* is the oldest of these, and includes twenty-two chapters in total, ranging across topics such as cultural issues (e.g., modernization, science, violence), sociological concerns (e.g., brainwashing, conversion), demographic/social themes (e.g., gender, children), and a few major sub-traditions within NRMs (e.g., paganism, esotericism, New Age). Lewis edited a second volume for Oxford,

co-edited with Inga B. Tolleffsen (2016), with thirty-seven chapters that effectively replaces rather than augments the first volume. This new volume includes treatments of social-scientific approaches, humanistic approaches, themes, controversies, and subtraditions. Despite being labeled as a second volume, the book is effectively a second edition and ought to be treated as such.

In addition to the more recent Oxford texts, several other reference books on NRMs are noteworthy. The other most recent reference book on new religious movements is George D. Chrystides and Benjamin E. Zeller's (2014) *The Bloomsbury Companion to New Religious Movements*, which contains thirty-one chapters arranged according to methodologies (e.g., sexuality studies, material culture), sub-traditions (e.g., New Age, Japanese NRMs), and themes (e.g., globalization, healing, gender, prophecy). Some of these overlap with the new Lewis and Tolleffsen (2016) volume, but in most cases those overlapping chapters were written by different authors. Additionally, Olav Hammer and Michael Rothstein's (2012) *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements* includes eighteen chapters on a range of topics. Seven of these chapters focus on thematic issues (e.g., charisma, rituals), and the remaining eleven chapters look at specific new religious movements. Finally, Peter B. Clarke's (2005) *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements*, part of the Routledge reference series, offers a typical encyclopedic treatment of the subject in short alphabetically-organized reference articles. Between the most recent Oxford Handbook, the Bloomsbury and Cambridge Companions, and the Routledge encyclopedia, these volumes provide a solid reference collection for the study of new religious movements.

One other reference book not formally addressing new religious movements nevertheless offers great value as bibliographic materials for the study of new religious movements. Since so many new religions express ideas falling within the overall topic of millennialism—ranging from apocalyptic expectations to hopes for a brave new utopian world—Catherine Wessinger's (2012) *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism* covers numerous groups and movements of relevance for NRM studies. Wessinger's opening essay, "Millennialism in Cross-Cultural Perspective," grounds the reference book but also situates new religiosity within this broader field of millennial studies. Many of the constituent chapters, on topics such as charisma, prophecy, and nativism, directly address the topic of NRMs.

BOOK SERIES AND MONOGRAPHIC LITERATURE

Scholars of new religious movements have published innumerable monographs and edited anthologies on the topic with a wide array of presses. Often, scholars publish such books with presses known for specialties in the specific geographic region, time period, or religious tradition with which the new religions under consideration are associated. One finds therefore a fair number of books on East Asian new religions published with the University of Hawaii Press, and a similar number on South Asian new religions with the State University of New York Press, in both cases because the presses publish existing series and have strong interests in those geographic areas and religious traditions. Most other books on NRMs are published outside of series by presses with strong overall catalogs in religious studies, such as Oxford University Press, New York University Press, or the University of California Press.

Four current and ongoing book series from three different presses offer particular relevance for the bibliography of new religious movements: the *New Religion* series and *Inform Series on Minority Religions and Spiritual Movements*, both produced by Routledge; the *Palgrave Studies in New Religions and Alternative Spiritualities*; and Brill's *Handbooks on Contemporary Religion*. All are edited by well-known scholars of new religions and are considered highly reputable and influential within the field.

Routledge's two book series, the *New Religion* series edited by James R. Lewis and George Chrystides, and the *Inform* series edited by Eileen Barker, respectively encompass monographs on specific NRMs and anthologies on topics or thematic treatments. Barker's *Inform* series builds on her work at the eponymously named Information Network Focus on Religious Movements (INFORM), which she operated at the London School of Economics from 1988 until her retirement. INFORM yearly sponsors several work-

shops and small conferences and, like *The Journal of CESNUR*, the *Inform* book series uses these gatherings as a publication pipeline. Books in this series therefore tend to contain cutting edge essays based on recent conference papers, with primarily a UK focus. Routledge publishes monograph-length treatments in its *New Religion* series. Together the two series have published the majority of recent books on the topic of new religious movements. The books tend to be priced for the library market rather than individual purchase or classroom adoption, and scholars of new religions will likely rely on library access to utilize these texts—a fact even more true for the Brill series, as noted below.

Palgrave's *Studies in New Religions and Alternative Spiritualities*, edited by the China/Norway-based James R. Lewis and Sweden-based Henrik Bogdan, has a decidedly international focus. Anthologies treating regional topics (Quebec, the Nordic nations, India, Israel) compromise most of its line, with a few other anthologies and compilations as well. Inaugurated in 2013, the series averages one or two books per year, drawing mostly from European scholars, but occasionally from highly regarded North Americans as well, e.g., Susan Palmer (Canada) and Eugene Gallagher (United States). This series' books are typically also priced for and oriented towards the library market, with a few exceptions.

Brill's *Handbooks on Contemporary Religion* series is one of the oldest continuing series (2007–current) with a focus on new religious movements, and one whose content most extends beyond the NRMs typically considered synonymous with cults (disclosure: I co-edit the Brill series). Entirely comprised of edited reference-style volumes, most of its books include upwards of 30 chapters and are intended to offer nearly complete coverage of the particular sub-specialty. Some of the volumes, such as those on East Asian new religions (Lukas Pokorny and Franz Winter, eds.), Scientology (James R. Lewis, ed.), and Theosophy (Olav Hammer and Mikael Rothstein, eds.) treat specific new religious movements or NRMs within a geographic region. Other volumes consider topics that are new but not necessarily traditionally associated with NRMs, such as volumes on megachurches (Stephen J. Hunt, ed.) and Indigenous Religions (Greg Johnson and Siv Ellen Kraft, eds.). Like most books published by Brill, the *Handbooks* are priced for a library market and individual scholars are likely to look to their libraries for access. Yet in the past two years, Brill has published two of the *Handbooks* as grant-funded open-access texts, a promising trend in terms of reader access.

Several specific monographs merit consideration in any collection. Some of these are formative books that, although now somewhat dated, serve as the most important books on specific new religions or types of new religious movements. On the New Age movement, scholars still refer to Wouter J. Hanegraaff's (1996) *New Age Religion and Western Culture* and Sarah Pike's (2006) *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*. Carole Cusack's (2010) *Invented Religions: Imagination, Fiction and Faith* is frequently cited on new religions predicated on fictional works, such as Jediism. E. Burke Rochford (2007) *Hare Krishna Transformed* on the Hare Krishna movement, one of the most notable new religions of the counterculture, is also frequently cited. Since groups that ended in violence tend to attract a disproportionate level of attention, students of NRMs often rely on a cluster of books on such topics as James D. Tabor and Eugene V. Gallagher's (1997) *Why Waco?: Cults and the Battle for Religious Freedom in America*, or David Chidester's (2003) *Salvation and Suicide: An Interpretation of Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple, and Jonestown*. Both of these books stand out in terms of influencing the following decades of scholarship on NRMs. Of the most recently published books on new religious movements, W. Michael Ashcraft's (2018) *A Historical Introduction to the Study of New Religious Movements*, offers particular value, since it is the first systematic attempt to develop the historiography of the field and provides an overview of the development of the study of new religions.

The study of the intersection of race and gender within the study of new religious movements has emerged as a fruitful new area of research, moving beyond the social problems paradigm, as Feltnate (2016) called it. Susan J. Palmer's (1994) *Moon Sisters, Krishna Mothers, Rajneesh Lovers: Women's Roles in New Religions* is dated, but also serves as the fundamental text to which later authors interested in gender and sex respond. Laura Vance's (2015) *Women in New Religions* and Henrik Bogdan and James R.

Lewis's (2014) *Sexuality and New Religious Movements* (in the Palgrave series) offer more recent perspectives. Numerous monographs look to the intersection of race, ethnicity, and new religions, such as Marie W. Dallam's (2007) work on Daddy Grace and the House of Prayer movement, or Edward Curtis's (2006) book on the Nation of Islam. In terms of more synoptic treatments, Judith Weisenfeld's (2016) *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity During the Great Migration* provides one of the best recent interpretations of the relationship between new religions and ethnic identity in the United States.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Online resources for the study of new religious movements must be approached with extreme care. Because of the contentiousness of the topic, most online treatments of NRMs tend to assume either an apologist approach or an anti-cult perspective. There was recently (at the time of this writing, in 2020) a dustup on Wikipedia wherein a volunteer editor removed references to well-respected scholar of new religions Massimo Introvigne, as well as his CESNUR center and *The Journal of CESNUR*, on the basis that Introvigne was not critical enough of new religions.² Anecdotally, it has been reported³ that members of new religions as well as anti-cult activists often edit the Wikipedia pages of major active new religious movements, engaging in protracted information wars.

The World Religions and Spirituality Project (WRSP, <https://www.wrldrels.org>), directed by sociologist of new religions David G. Bromley, serves as the best online resource for new religious movements. The WRSP builds upon the earlier New Religious Movements Homepage Project, founded by the late Jeffrey K. Hadden, one of the first scholars to study NRMs. Bromley, alongside several other colleagues in the study of new religions, relaunched the WRSP in 2010. The heart of the WRSP is the database of profiles of new religions, currently comprising over 500 entries on specific new religious movements, small religious groups, and occasionally individuals of relevance to the study of new religions. Bromley commissions academic researchers, sometimes senior scholars and sometimes graduate students, to write the entries, and they undergo peer review before posting. The WRSP is a volunteer service, and therefore some of the entries are somewhat dated and would benefit from updating. Despite this, it is generally the best online resource with which to start when researching a new religious movement.

PRIMARY SOURCES

Accessing primary sources associated with new religious movements is relatively easy. Most NRMs still active today maintain websites and publication offices, and unless a student or scholar is engaged in highly specialized research, there is seldom a need to visit physical archives. In my experience, most primary sources published by NRMs are cataloged in WorldCat and accessible via interlibrary loan, often from seminaries or other religious institutions associated with the new religions. In many cases, new religions have digitized their own sources and made them freely available and, in others, libraries or archives have done the same. Historical new religions that are no longer active, such as the Shakers or Millerites, present more of a problem, but generally the same bibliographic sources of use to religious historians in the broad sense are applicable to the study of such historical new religions.

Two published anthologies of primary sources produced by new religious movements bear mention here. In both cases, the editors curated the collections, and the published books offer an easy way for instructors or students unfamiliar with new religions to easily read some representative primary sources. Dereck Daschke and W. Michael Ashcraft's (2005) *New Religious Movements: A Documentary Reader* offers the more general of primary source collections. The book contains selected materials from historical new religions (e.g., Theosophy, Christian Science, Jehovah's Witnesses) and more recent ones (e.g., Wicca, UFO religions, Unification Church, Nation of Islam). With the exception of Soka Gakkai and Santería, all the new religions considered in the anthology are Anglophone in nature and primarily North American based. A more recent and specialized anthology of primary sources, Emily Suzanne Clark and Brad Stod-

dard's (2019) *Race and New Religious Movements in the USA*, covers different ground than the Daschke and Ashcraft volume, not just in terms of its topical focus, but also the primary sources and movements included. Clark and Stoddard curated materials from movements ranging from the Klan to Latter-day Saints to Moorish Science Temple and Peoples Temple. In combination, these two anthologies of primary sources provide excellent coverage, at least of the American context.

CONCLUSION

New religious movements remain a topic of interest to researchers and students, even fifty years after the first major wave of groups that came to be publicly identified as cults and/or new religions. The proliferation of publications within the subfield has challenged the ease with which, in previous decades, new students of the topic could acquaint themselves with it by reading a few dozen books and a single journal. The subfield has reached a greater maturity, with its second generation of scholars now building on the foundation and, in the process, founding new journals, book series, and other resources. That being said, although now somewhat broader, the subfield of NRM studies remains small enough that a dedicated librarian can provide access to the most salient and useful of bibliographic resources on NRMs through subscriptions to only a handful of journals and book series. I suspect that fifty years from now that will not be the case.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 See, for example, Daniel Lis, William F.S. Miles, and Tudor Parfitt, eds., *In the Shadow of Moses: New Jewish Movements in Africa and the Diaspora* (Los Angeles: African Academic Press, 2016), which uses the concept of NRM to examine contemporary and historical Jewish religious movements in Africa. Or, April D. DeConick, *The Gnostic New Age: How a Countercultural Spirituality Revolutionized Religion from Antiquity to Today* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), which applies concepts from the study of NRMs and terms used by and about twentieth-century new religions to religious movements from late antiquity and pre-modern eras.
- 2 See "[Massimo Introvigne and CESNUR](#)" on "Wikipedia:Reliable sources/Noticeboard/Archive 278," accessed February 29, 2020. For some context of the debate, see the pages, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Massimo_Introvigne, accessed 29 February 2020; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:CESNUR>, accessed 29 February 2020.
- 3 This topic was discussed in a private email list amongst NRM scholars in December 2019, in response to the Introvigne edits. Scholars specializing in a few particularly controversial new religions pointed to unusual editing patterns on the Wikipedia pages, but no researchers volunteered to track such changes or follow up on their reasons. This remains an understudied area in the intersection of information literacy, information wars, media studies, and new religious movements.