SUZANNE OWEN

I joined the BASR as a postgraduate student and attended my first BASR conference in 2003 at University College Chester, as it was then, where I gave a 'lightning talk', as part of a works-in-progress panel, on a debate about researching Native American religious traditions. James Cox, my supervisor, was then the Honorary Secretary of the BASR, the position I hold currently. I enjoyed the conference and had hoped to return for the next one. However, as a postgraduate on a limited budget, the next BASR conference I could attend was in 2006 at Bath Spa. I don't think I've missed one since.

From 2013 to 2022, I was the coordinating editor of DISKUS, the Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religions (now JBASR), the first publication venue for many of us. My article, 'The Production of Sacred Space in the Mi'kmaq Powwow' (DISKUS 11 [2010]), was inspired by Kim Knott's presentation at a BASR conference applying Henri Lefebvre's spatial analysis to the study of religion.

During my PhD studies, I was aware that I would find it difficult to get a post in Religious Studies because I wasn't researching a 'world religion'. With that in mind, I became a tutor in three subject areas at Edinburgh: Religious Studies, Canadian Studies and Social Anthropology, and researched as much as I could on methodological aspects of studying religion. The problem was, most positions advertised in Religious Studies stated a preference for a specialist in a 'world religion'. Often, in the UK at least, positions went to people without a Religious Studies degree, making it all the more frustrating. However, just as I was finishing my PhD, I was lucky to get a Teaching Fellowship in World Religions at the University of St Andrews, which no doubt helped me get the part-time lecturing position at Leeds Trinity (though I was the second-choice candidate). Two of the modules I was given to teach were World Religions 1 and World Religions 2. A little exasperated, I presented a short paper on the issue at the University of Stirling and was persuaded to publish it as an article ('The World Religions paradigm: Time for a change', 2011). Eventually, I was able to change the modules, dropping any mention of 'world religions' except as a topic examining the influence of this type of categorisation.

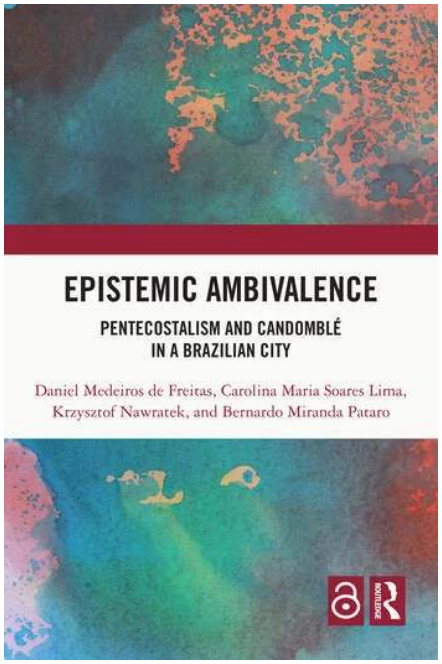
I am thankful to the BASR for providing a space to explore ways we might teach and research 'religion' beyond the artificial boundaries persistent in our field, and also for the fellowship, making the conference seem more like a holiday or an annual meet-up of friends.

reviews

FREITAS, D. M. DE, LIMA, C. M. S, NAWRATEK, AND PATARO, B. M. (2024) EPISTEMIC AMBIVALENCE: PENTECOSTALISM AND CANDOMBLÉ IN A BRAZILIAN CITY. ROUTLEDGE. IX + 108PP. HBK £130. ISBN: 978-1-032-16312-3.

"Ambivalence" – a synonym for uncertainty, doubt and inconclusiveness – stands right at the centre of this intriguing volume. Where once we moderns knew all about religion, now it seems, the architecture has changed.

The subtitle of the introductory chapter is, 'The confusing religious landscape in Brazil', and it opens with two quotes from interviews conducted by the authors in the city of Belo Horizontale that strike right to the heart of any sense of stable ground. The first interviewee says, "I am evangelistic, but I do not like to follow the church's doctrines" while the second states, "I do not go to church … I do not have any religion. I believe in God, not a religion" (p. 1). Later, we are furnished with statistics about Brazil's religious populations including Census data specifying numbers of Catholics and Protestants (pp. 51-2; see also p. 4), as well as maps detailing the distributions of religious infrastructures in Belo Horizontale (pp. 55-64). Perhaps we are on solid ground after all. At one level, it is no surprise, given Brazil's colonial history, that the majority of Brazilians identify as Catholic. Catholic places of worship have played a structuring role in colonial urbanism; they occupy key locations in the planned urban fabric predominantly in the older, more established neighbourhoods of towns and cities, and Belo Horizontale is no exception (p. 5 and p. 60). And, amidst the demolitions, renovations and new developments of the city, the Catholic Church has, unsurprisingly, exerted a gravitational force not merely upon the shape and texture of urban space in Brazil, but in the very definition of 'religion' itself, including in the idea that Candomblé and other Afro-Brazilian religions are evil. But with significant decreases among those identifying as Catholic in the Southeast of the country (p. 52), the presence of temples is no guarantee for the presence of worshippers (according to one study conducted in Rio de Janeiro in the late 1990s, only 18% of Catholics attend church on a weekly basis, p. 92).



By contrast, Pentecostal, charismatic and evangelical populations are growing nationally and in Belo Horizontale, their infrastructures spreading in areas of new and often precarious urban development for example along "major traffic corridors" (p. 59) as well as at the peripheries of the city, in rented spaces and in re-purposed older buildings "where the Brazilian State has been absent in providing basic services" (p. 103), although they are also sometimes built from scratch to compete "for symbolic dominance" (p. 62), such as the main church of the Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (IURD). But evangelical success in areas experiencing rapid urban change also points to "fluid loyalty among Protestants, with many … attending different temples or switching between churches" (p. 54) as well as "a more informal and