ants of the sub-continent. Indeed as Timothy Fitzgerald commented, the putative religion "Hinduism" is perhaps located "more in secular universities in Euro America than in Indian villages." At best it was "a Europeanised version of the dominant Brahmanical ideology" and of little relevance to the villagers who made up the vast majority of India's population. A parallel process occured with the other cultures of the world, including Japanese, Chinese, African and native American.

Following on from this, scholars of religion, such as Tomoko Masuzawa, Suzanne Owen and James Cox have considered the concept of "religion" and its derivative "world religion" as an essentialising and problematic construct; a reification that constrains a rich and diverse human experience into a narrow Eurocentric and Eurohegemonic framework. They have suggested alternative frameworks for studying and teaching this phenomenon.

I want to make it clear that I have no problem with this line of thinking and my intention is not to contradict any of their findings or to push back against this trend. I do however have a problem with one result of this line of research. Whether scholars like it or not, large numbers of people across the world now see their identity in terms of the World Religion paradigm. In India, for example, the majority of the educated population consider themselves as belonging to a religion called Hinduism. The process of the "Brahmanization" or "Sanskritization" of the vast variety of local deities and religious practices is well under way. And of course the politicization of Hinduism in the form of aggressively Hindu political parties is having a major impact on the country. A parallel process is going on in the Islamic world culminating in the rise of political Islam, with Buddhism in Sri Lanka, and many other examples. In the United Kingdom, the existence of such organizations as the Hindu Council UK, Muslim Council of Britain, and Network of Buddhist Organisations is evidence that the World Religions Paradigm is deeply entrenched in the consciousness of these communities. It is a source of identity for large numbers of people.

Thus the concept of "religions" and "world religions" began as an academic exercise by white (mainly male) scholars in 19th century Europe, but an exercise with a colonialist and hegemonic background and consequences. It has now however been thoroughly taken on board by many millions of people who self-identity as one of these "world religions". The theorizing of 19th Century Western scholars has become a lived reality throughout the world. Would telling the rest of the world that they have identified with an imposed illusory construct (in effect, that what they think is their reality is false) not be replacing 19th Century colonialism with a neo-colonialist turn be a hegemonic exercise in telling people who they are and what they should be thinking?

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meet the members

GEORGE D. CHRYSSIDES

I first became acquainted with BASR in 1992, at the invitation of Terry Thomas, who was then the secretary, and who was trying to boost the organisation's dwindling membership. There were only twelve of us who met for the annual meeting at King Alfred's College (now the University of Winchester), but Terry succeeded in getting the organisation to grow rapidly. I became the Bulletin editor from 2002 to 2006, and was made an Honorary Member in 2009, after retiring from the University of Wolverhampton the previous year.

I was a part-time tutor for the Open University, in which Terry was part of its Religious Studies team, and who helped to pioneer the "Man's Religious Quest" course, subsequently renamed "The Religious Quest". Terry was keen to encourage students to undertake fieldwork, which was new to me at the time. Since there were few religious communities other than Christian churches in Plymouth, where I was then living, a weekend in London became an annual event for my students, when we visited Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim and Sikh organisations.

Fieldwork was much easier when I moved to Wolverhampton in 1992. When I inaugurated a module on new religious movements, I was determined that fieldwork should be an important part of students' study. The Jehovah's Witnesses' City Overseer was particularly helpful to us, and was instrumental in sparking my own interest in the Watchtower organisation, which had been unduly neglected in academic study, and on which much of my work now focuses.

What do I like about it BASR? It's a friendly, supportive organisation, where it's good to meet up with old friends and new researchers, to showcase parts of one's own work and to keep abreast of what others are doing. I'm a regular attender at its annual conference, having only missed one meeting since my first one.

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.