

39. *Topographies of Faith. Religion in Urban Spaces*. Edited by Irene BECCI, Marian BURCHARDT and José CASANOVA. (International Studies in Religion and Society; 17). Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2013. 229 pp.

Pope Francis is the first megapolis Pope. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, he considers the “Challenges from urban cultures” (§§ 71–75) as Gospel matrix, obviously reflecting his own experience. Almost simultaneously with the Pontifical text appears this collection of 11 scholarly points of view. The publication project goes back to three sociological meetings held in Germany, viz., at the “Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung” and at Göttingen University in 2009 and 2010. In the course of those exchanges, the famous sociologist of religion José Casanova (Georgetown) had identified a lack of “ethnographic scholarship on the ways in which religious life and urban changes are mutually and concurrently shaped” today (p. vii). The other two editors, Becci (now Lausanne) and Burchhardt (Göttingen), offer a contextualisation of this research in a paradigm shift: the social sciences have undergone a “spatial turn” (p. 13); therefore, they want to understand how, in the world's biggest cities, “religion takes place.”

In 1984, the French Jesuit historian Michel de Certeau distinguished between place and space: “While place is simply the physical environment, space is the outcome of people’s practices to appropriate a place, [space is, therefore] ‘a practiced place’” (p. 149). It is along this usage that Becci can say: cities comprise many urban places and infinitely many spaces (ibid.). The editors have grouped the articles in three blocks; the three section titles are not particularly clear: 1. Religious innovations in urban contexts; 2. Urban dynamics of migration, religious diversity and transnational religion; 3. Religion, economic inequalities and social exclusion. What really seems to be behind the scheme is the triple question: What happens to religious people when they move into cities, when they encounter other religions, and when they face material injustice?

Murat Es writes on Anatolian Alevi. What happens to their religious identity when they move from their rural origins into a modern city? The surprising observation is - and that is true both of inner-Turkish migration as of emigration - they do not get secularised in the sense of losing tradition. What really happens is “religious formation” in a manifold sense. A unified, codified, scripture based religion with a formed staff is coming into being: “Alevi religionizing” takes place, through physical institutions—houses of worship: *cemevleri* - and through legal institutions - recognition as religious community in Germany. Obviously, the whole process of religionizing presupposes a dichotomy of the secular as opposed to the religious (p. 41).

Samadia Sadouni considers Somalis in Johannesburg; they are mostly Muslim refugees. Xenophobia is countered by a sense of Islamic solidarity.

Peter van der Veer compares the cities of Mumbai and Singapore. They have a lot in common, both being “colonial cities, products of imperial trade connections” (p. 69) as well as financial centres and port locations; both get their cheap labour force from Tamil Nadu and Bangladesh and both have an ethnic and religious claim to hegemony: Maratha-Hindu in the case of Mumbai, Chinese-Confucian-and-Christian in Singapore’s case. Attempts at homogenisation must be stated for both cities, but much more forcefully so in Singapore, which is security obsessed to the point of boredom. Singapore seems to envision Confucianism as its civil religion; Mumbai is transforming Hinduism into a religious nationalism. Both megacities are products of British imperialism; but while the concept of how state and society should interact was obviously similar, it had profoundly differing effects in both places. One factor for such differences is Singapore’s disconnecting itself from Malaysia. In Singapore, it “is the state that transforms diverse religions and ethnicities in a Chinese-dominated ‘harmonious’ multiculturalism, whereas in Mumbai the state is not much more than a resource for conflicting political patronage systems that are partly criminalized” (p. 70).

We remain in Mumbai still for a while, because Leilah Vevaina looks, from another angle, again at India’s biggest city. What she focusses on is her own ethnic group, the declining Iranian minority: the Parsis, and, in particular their burial site - the “towers of silence”. In 1669, the British Colonial Governor allowed its first construction in what was then South Bombay (p. 77). The point is that Parsi tradition calls for “excarnation”: the corpses are being put into one of the towers to await decomposition. This has recently created several preoccupations: cremation would be more

up-to-date, and even the Parsi community itself has its reservations, because, among other things, photographs might “expose” the bodies (p. 79); on the other hand, the towers of silence and its surroundings are a tangible expression of Indian Parsi existence (p. 92).

Synnøve Bendixen has accompanied, already for her doctoral thesis, young Muslim women in Berlin; they all belong to the Muslim youth movement “Muslimische Jugend in Deutschland”, which comprises almost 50 branches in the country (p. 100). She describes five developments: the pluralisation and fragmentation of religious authority in Islam, the expansion of religious education, a ‘turn to Islam’ among the young also in the usage of visible signs of religiosity that create negative reactions in non-Muslims but open up networks of inner-Islamic friendship and solidarity, an increased offer of religious spaces as ‘infrastructures of action’, as Salwa Ismail calls it, in reaction to urban anonymity, and, finally, a pattern that has already been observed for religions in general by José Casanova: as a reaction to the challenge of modernity, Muslims fashion their own version of it (p. 109). Berlin will, later, be visited again, by one of the editors, Irene Becci. She has studied more widely what happened to religion in Germany’s East, both when imprisoned under the DDR regime until 1989, and afterwards. Here, she restricts herself to an East Berlin Baptist congregation. The Berlin context is fairly unique, because while in the Western *Länder* of Germany more than 70% of the population is religiously affiliated, in the East, the religious norm is “non-belonging” (p. 155). So, two distinct types of secularism need to be stated for the country’s East and West respectively: while in the East, especially the lower classes retain even today the profound scepticism against religion that communist indoctrination wanted to transmit, in the West, distance from religion reflects, rather, an intellectual outlook on life. Eastern Germans retain family and neighbourhood importance that had a key role in DDR life, over and against the individualising influences from the West; expectably, it is also religious offers stressing close community values that grow most in Eastern Germany. Some say they find, in a non bureaucratic community, either a parallel to their family network or its substitute: an *Ersatzfamilie* (p. 153); but Becci is more sceptical. She seems to see a certain Puritan attitude in the new, missionary generation of East German Baptists, and, possibly therefore, an efficiency in the tactics of “closeness” and “local belongingness”; what she misses, however, is “belonging together”: members seem not to really share the same view and path of life (p. 165).

Weishan Huang looks at New York: why is the originally Chinese movement of Falun Gong, a new global denomination, campaigning in Manhattan, of all places? For one, it has been chosen for its “global locality”, it is a “hub of networks” (p. 142f.). Secondly, since mainland China prohibits the movement as an “evil cult”, Chinese immigrants use their position towards Falun Gong as an indicator of group positioning abroad. Finally, the attraction raised by public *qigong* exercises in the city helps find sympathisers to whom one can then explain the injustice of the movement’s persecution at home. The third editor of the book, Marian Burchardt, analyses three Christian Churches in Cape Town. South Africa is special in the continent because its population had high expectations in collective progress; now, people have to handle disappointments and face an inefficient, remote administration on state and municipal level. Additionally, Burchardt observes a hypermobility among the poor. These factors create the twin aspirations of current urban dynamics: people want “belonging and success” (p. 170). Ajay Gandhi presents Hindu-Muslim borderlines. He observes border-crossing as well as demarcation, especially the media’s need for a Muslim alterity clearly distinguishable by globalised signs: public opinion wants to see their Muslims in cliché vestments. For A. Gandhi, this “signals not the obvious separation but rather the desperate inability to delineate religious boundaries” (p. 204). Godwin Onuoha sees the recent history of Nigeria’s Pentecostal Christianity as a movement from “exit” (withdrawal in view of a failing state) to “engagement” (Christians re-engaging with politics after the advent of a Christian president)—with the consequence of instability and new polarisations in the country (p. 223).

The only paper that does not study, apart from a concluding illustration from São Paulo, a particular geographical locality is Casanova’s own contribution. Why is, he asks, religion increasingly relevant in processes of urbanisation? His answer contains three aspects: (a) Both religious and secular domains become, in the course of global modernisation, more institutionalised; the Christian, Western division between the religious and the secular has gone global. Institutionalised religion, rather than being a pre-modern phenomenon, is distinctly modern

(p. 121). (b) Human rights, and therefore individual religious freedom, have become sacred values. It is this framework that makes religiously pluralist social structure possible (p. 122). (c) Urban centres have a particular effect on religious authorities, on established hierarchies and on elite–folk divides in piety: fragmentation, pluralisation and democratisation (p. 124). Casanova’s patterns can be rediscovered in other contributions to the book. - *Felix Körner*, SJ.