



# Anthropology Book Forum

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**Eds. by Pamela J. Stewart, and Andrew J. Strathern.** 2022. *The Palgrave Handbook of Anthropological Ritual Studies*, Palgrave Macmillan, 395 pp, ISBN 978-3-030-76824-9

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This volume engages in the varied and complex field of ritual practices, with a special focus on religious rituals. The work contributes to the field's vitality with original approaches emerging directly from data collected from a great variety of contexts. The contributions combine critical overviews of theoretical and methodological approaches and in-depth ethnographic research. Ritual and other key concepts, such as performance, sacrifice, religion, magic and sport, are complicated through a variety of viewpoints, methods and ethnographic data. Particular emphasis is given to ritual's dynamism, historical processes, and to the complex relationship between continuity, creativity, adaptability, cross-contextual influences, imposition and individual agency.

The book is divided into four parts. In the introductory chapter, Andrew Strathern and Pamela Stewart trace a critical overview of ritual studies, pointing out the dynamic between continuity and change, and explore main themes and less-studied aspects of rituals, such as concealment, "absent rituals," failure, contestation and negotiation. The first part presents new perspectives on established themes in ritual studies. In Chapter 2, Roger Ivan Lohmann considers charismatic Christian practices of dream sharing in Papua New Guinea as a form of reproducing and democratising charisma. Through a combination of synchronic and diachronic analysis, he shows the articulation of enthusiasm and stability in religious services as well as ruptures and continuity with traditional religious practices. In Chapter 3, Günther Schörner develops a critical overview of theoretical approaches and historical, anthropological and archaeological sources on sacrifice, expanding beyond animal killing. The chapter explores aspects such

as performativity, language, meaning, aim, aesthetic and emotional experience, human and more-than-human relationships, as well as the contextualization of rituals in historical, cultural, social and environmental settings. In Chapter 4, Thomas Widlok analyses how a better understanding of the wider spectrum of economic transfers can improve our understanding of religions and rituals, using the key concept of sharing as a form of dealing with asymmetries among humans and between humans and other beings and forces. He also explores sharing in ritual and religious practices both in egalitarian and hierarchical societies, such as the San of Southern African and the Catholic Church, and its interconnections with economic processes, social and political relationships and daily life practices. Based on ethnographic research on prophetic churches in Angola, in Chapter 5, Ruy Llera Blanes examines how ritualised acts of *cortesía* (courtesy) are rife with ambiguity, since they are used not only to express hospitality, but also produce a sense of foreignness, distinction and separation from (internal and foreign) others and confirms hierarchical positions. These acts inform aesthetic, bodily and social interactions, and are connected with traditional values, historical processes and politics. In Chapter 6, Nigel Rapport analyses how the creation and performance of personal rituals furnish a sense of “home,” a comfortably informal, personal lifeworld, security and familiarity, as well as an anchorage for personal identity in situations of mobility, such as migration and work. Key concepts include “ritual consciousness,” that “concerns the particular, subjective way in which a kind of reiteration and transcendence is thought and felt by a particular individual” (p.124), reflectivity, intentionality, instrumentality, and a private and internal dimension of thought and feeling. In Chapter 7, John W. Traphagan offers an insight into sport as a ritualised social and physical space in which normative values of society, masculinity, identity and power relationships can be performed, embodied, regulated, imprinted, contested and negotiated. In Chapter 8, Andrew J. Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart explore language and cognition in ritual practices, focusing on performance, communication, meaning, sensory impacts, feelings, embodiment, metaphor, abduction and prehension. They also analyse how change can take place, how rituals can be transferred from one context to another or adapt to new situations, and new meanings that can be attributed to old rituals.

The second part of the book explores healing rituals. In Chapter 9, Anne Kjærsgaard and Eric Venbrux analyse rituals centering on grave-visiting in Northwestern Europe and show how people deal with the complex transition from life to death, cope with loss and

memory and maintain interactions with the (un)dead, in connection with cemeteries' architecture and regulations. Based on in-depth ethnographic research in the multiethnic society of Inner Mongolia, in Chapter 10, Saijirahu Buyanchugla explores shamanic healing rituals and the conceptions that sustain them, ancestral communication, the process of becoming a shaman and medical pluralism, and shows how common principles sustain both biomedicine and complementary and alternative medicines. In Chapter 11, Anne Sigfrid Grønseth examines religious ritual practices as a dynamic space for negotiating and configuring identity, belonging and well-being for transnational migrants and refugees in a context of discrimination, vulnerability, uncertainty and risk. Her approach centres on empathic face-to-face encounters in everyday life, embodiment, sensorial experience, imagination and emotions.

The volume's third part is devoted to cultural intimacy and innovation. In Chapter 12, Sanjoy and Shampa Mazumdar explore a Hindu home-temple in California focusing on the role of ambience, physical and spatial elements, the materiality and immateriality of architecture, experiential and emotional components in ritual and the multisensoriality of sacred engagement. Employing Clifford Geertz's view of rituals as models *of* and models *for* society, in Chapter 13, Anne-Christine Hornborg critically analyses new individual-centred ritualised therapeutic and coaching practices in Sweden that promise to develop inner potential, authenticity, renewal and success in life and at work, as well as their insertion into the market, legitimacy and communication strategies, the distribution of moral responsibility when rituals fail and the risk of transforming social criticism into self-criticism. Based on long-term fieldwork on walking pilgrimages to the Marian shrine of Fátima in Portugal and on Mary Magdalene pilgrimages influenced by Goddess spirituality, in Chapter 14, Anna Fedele explores "ritual crafting," and creative ritual forms of dealing with experiences of vulnerability, through an approach based on lived religion, embodiment, materiality, intimacy and a focus on smaller, ephemeral rituals aside from official celebrations.

The fourth part is devoted to comparative studies of ritual practices. In Chapter 15, Garry W. Trompf offers a critical survey of literature on sorcery and witchcraft through an interdisciplinary approach, paying special attention to social dynamics, changing conditions, patterns of belief, power, conflict, context, internal logic and technical repertory. He also explores continuities and discontinuities of sorcery and witchcraft in

Papua New Guinea after social and cultural changes and the spread of a Christian revivalist movement. In Chapter 16, through a comparative study in Sweden, England, the United States and Nigeria, Simon Coleman shows less-explored aspects of Pentecostalism, such as the problematic nature of the concept of ritual, conversion and distinction from otherness, ruptures and continuities with respect to previous traditions, the articulation of sacred experience with everyday life, porosity, partiality and the believers' combination of elements from different traditions. In Chapter 17, Jens Kreinath develops the concept of *interrituality*, through keen observation of devotional practices at sacred sites shared by Orthodox Christians and Arab Alawites in Turkey, highlighting similarities in ritual postures, gestures, movements, the aesthetics of sensory perceptions and other forms of entering into a relationship with sacred objects and places, as an expression of the dynamics of interreligious relations and the ability of rituals to interact with other rituals and different social institutions. In Chapter 18, Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew J. Strathern explore change and continuity in ceremonial exchanges of wealth and goods, and death rituals in Papua New Guinea, in a situation marked by social transformations, competition, conflict (often expressed in terms of witchcraft), precarity and fear. The building of and care for elaborated gravesites became the locus of expression of wealth, social status, political relationships, competitions, alliances and economic transactions. In the Epilogue, Andrew J. Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart examine changes and adaptations in religious and daily ritual practices during the Covid-19 pandemic, with the surge of digital communication in everyday life and restrictions on movements and gatherings.

In sum, this collection is a precious tool for researchers and students from various disciplines (anthropology, history, sociology, religious studies, among others) interested in rituals and religion, as well as other specific topics (such as sacrifice, healing, sport, hospitality, pilgrimages, memory and materiality) analysed in individual chapters.

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