G A B R I E L A   K I L I Á N O V Á

Introduction: Ritual, Conflict and Consensus[1]

On the evidence of published works and the unflagging discussions in professional journals, one may observe that ritual is currently one of the research themes that are of central interest to a variety of sciences.[2] When first researched, this subject was mainly the domain of social and cultural anthropology, sociology, history of religion or psychology. But approximately in the second half of the 20th century it came into the field of vision of various other disciplines, e.g. history, theatrology, ethology etc. Currently the concept of ritual shares the fate of other terms widely used not only by scholars but also in public discussion, such as "culture", "identity", "memory" and "tradition". The development of a special discipline of ritual studies at universities in the US and other countries from the 1980s may be considered a logical direct result of the scholars' transdisciplinary interest in the ritual behaviour of man and animals (Platvoet 2006).

What is it that causes the persistent lively interest in ritual behaviour? Undoubtedly, it is the complexity and breadth of this cultural phenomenon, which offers a variety of possible approaches to the study of it. Also, perhaps, the fascination with symbolic, formalised and repetitive actions that numerous rituals present. And probably also the recurrent question of whether rituals really fulfil important and special functions in which they cannot be substituted by other social actions. Last but not least, scholars are interested in the fate of rituals in the present day, in the circumstances of complex modern societies in transition to a reflexive postmodernity.

While ritual remains a fundamental research concept in social and cultural anthropology (de Coppet 2000), in the past and equally in the present it has been defined in diverse ways, some of them contradictory, which led Jack Goody as long ago as the 1970s to criticise the term and propose that it be abandoned: in his view, it was unclear to the point of confusion (Goody 1977). However, this did not happen. Due to the immense interest in ritual, with research being focused on this concept from diverse theoretical approaches and from the standpoints of various scholarly disciplines, it has been employed in scholarly writings with many different meanings, variously narrower or broader. The differing theoretical approaches and conceptions of rituals are also reflected in the chapters of this book.

I think it is worth noting that in the classical works, those of E. Durkheim for example, it is particularly actions associated with a sacred as opposed to a profane character that are thought of as ritual. In Durkheim's conception, however, this did not mean that he narrowed down what he understood by ritual purely to religious practices, though some later researchers used the concept of ritual in this manner (Wilson 1957: 9). It was Durkheim who noted in the course of his work that not only do religious procedures fall into the sacred domain but so do others, for example rituals consolidating or affirming power might take on a sacral character (Durkheim 1965: 243ff.). This approach, avoiding oversimplification, remained inspirational for the further defining of ritual performances (both religious and secular) and their connections to the sacred and profane realms.

From the second half of the 20th century a broader understanding of the concept of ritual has established itself in anthropology. In contrast to Monica Wilson (1957), Jack Goody expressed the opinion that the term should be applicable to formalised and repetitive actions of any kind, irrespective of whether they pertained to religious or secular behaviour (Goody 1961).

With hindsight it is evident that the broader understanding of ritual gradually became dominant in anthropology. A contributing factor here was certainly the increasing scholarly interest in secular, repetitive, symbolic activities linked with the observed great changes in social reality in complex modern societies. And so the reader is not surprised to find the term defined as follows even in a book specifically devoted to ritual

and religion: "I take the term 'ritual' to denote *the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers*." And furthermore: "this definition encompasses much more than religious behavior." (Rappaport 2008: 24, italics in original). The debate on how the concept of ritual is to be demarcated continues in this publication. Granted, the authors are not concerned with finding a universally valid definition but rather a serviceable instrument that will help with analyses and interpretations in their case studies. Eva Maria Knoll contributes to developing the concept of ritual with a theoretical essay where she addresses the possibility of a new ritual form emerging, combining two existing and widespread rituals in western Euro-American societies.

Whether ritual should be studied as a foil onto which potential and open conflicts may be projected or alternatively as a social action intended to contribute to the reproduction of the social structure and create conditions for social consensus (equally, as a social action which may directly evoke conflict) remains the principal question in the following chapters. Conflict here means action, whether real or virtual, that is based on the idea that the interests, goals, intentions or norms of individuals or social groups (or two or more parties) cannot be combined; that they are incompatible. The motives that lead to conflict are not easy to investigate. However, as Elwert reasons, normally one can classify them into three categories, which he defines as "honor, power and material gain". At the same time, there will probably be diverse combinations of motives in the various cases of conflict (Elwert 2001: 2542–2545). The author points out that although conflicts are given various labels and presented in the first instance as ethnic, political, religious or ideological quarrels, there are frequently economic aspects in the background which become the trigger of violent action (Elwert 2003: 219ff.). An emerging conflict may be heightened if a manifest long-term exclusion of certain individuals or social groups has occurred in society and if the actors in the conflict manage to create social boundaries between the conflicting parties. These aspects (among others) are addressed here, for example in the chapters by Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka and Christian Jahoda.

If the study of rituals from the point of view of conflict forms one unifying line in the publication, on the other hand the authors are equally concerned with ritual performances as practices that may create a space for the inclusion of various groups and individuals, for agreement on commonly held higher values, or for the reproduction of the existing social order. We could say that the discussion is continuing in the tradition of Durkheim, for whom "the rites are, above all, the means by which the social group periodically reaffirms itself" (Durkheim 1965: 287ff.). In such a case attention is focused particularly on the social structures and norms and their reproduction by means of rituals, and also on the transmission of ritual knowledge. Rituals become procedures for the affirmation of social cohesion. One may go on to examine ritual as performative practice, which through the actors in the ritual process reflects political, economic or ideological interests of individuals and groups. Since the various individuals and social groups may have a variety of purposes, goals and needs, ritual can become a performative practice that offers them a space to bridge dissensions and to establish mutual agreement, as Helmut Lukas and Gebhard Fartacek demonstrate with supporting ethnographic data. However, this may also happen in reverse. Ritual may become an action linked with a certain ideology or religious idea, on account of which differences emerge between groups and also in the practice of rituals: Andre Gingrich and Tatiana Bužeková discuss these matters in their papers. An extreme form may be ideological conflict emerging between the ruling elite and the majority of the population, which may involve, for example, the outlawing of a religion, with a ban on performing rituals and owning religious artefacts and the persecution of priests and religious believers: this is the theme of Maria-Katharina Lang's paper.

RITUAL AND TRANSFORMATION

For the majority of ritual practices characteristic features include self-presentation as unchanging and timeless activities, hence the combination of the words "ritual" and "transformation" may appear contradictory. However, like every social activity repeated in historic time, ritual performance, too, may undergo to changes. According to Kreinath, among changes of ritual we may distinguish the modifications, the lesser changes that do not alter the ritual's essence. On the other hand there are transformations, hence fundamental changes, which can affect the ritual's entire character. Kreinath sums up the difference as follows: "modifi-

cation is a change *in* ritual, whereas a transformation is a change *of* ritual" (Kreinath 2004: 268, italics in original). Hence one may ask, what happens to rituals in a time of dynamic social change? How do rituals change in such conditions, and how may ritual practices affect changes of the social order?

Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka traces ritual communication as a means that may create new alliances, contribute to changes in collective belonging and call into question or alter social (ethnic) boundaries. In her approach ritual becomes a reflection of the image of social reality, which in political communication may appear in two forms. Firstly, as an image founded on collective relationships and where collectivities such as the nation or ethnic groups play a key role. On the other hand, political communication at the present time equally develops an image of social reality as fragmented, individualised, flexible and dynamic. This tension of two portraits of social reality forms a framework for the study of rituals in conditions of rapid social change.

For Pfaff-Czarnecka a typical feature of rituals is their dynamic character, which she examines on the basis of five theoretical approaches. Firstly, following the opinions of David Gellner (1999), she determines three dimensions of religiosity, which are carried over into three forms of rituals. In the second theoretical approach she focuses on the dynamic character of rituals. This, according to Pfaff-Czarnecka, unfolds from the tension that emerges in the performance of ritual actions and the negotiation about their meanings. Thirdly, she conceives of rituals as complex social situations that confirm the social order. Rituals are therefore suitable for the projection of dissensions that cast doubt on existing social norms and social boundaries of belonging. In her fourth approach the author draws attention to a hitherto little pursued question: how is the simultaneity of rituals in time and space created, and what does this process signify in the context of growing transnationalisation in the contemporary world? Finally, the fifth approach links up with the preceding one, when Pfaff-Czarnecka, basing her argument on the views of Michael Oppitz (1999), focuses on the creation of rituals by means of certain elements that can be assembled, relocated in time and space, and transferred to various cultural milieux. Thanks to this capability, ritual practices can not only link different periods of time but also profit from their symbolic wealth of varied ritual elements.

Her example is the Hindu ritual complex of *Dasain* (also called *Durga Puja*), which in contemporary Nepal is an object of political conflict and a central element of ethnic mobilisation, reflecting changes in political communication and an attempt at political change. As a ritual of power, based on Hindu religion and symbols, which spread throughout unified Nepal from the first half of the 19th century thanks to the organised support of the Hindu rulers, *Dasain* in recent times has become a convenient space for conflicts in a country with notable cultural and religious differentiation. Pfaff-Czarnecka has been able to show how the behaviour of ritual actors can bring about change. At the same time, however, the raison d'être of the ritual in question is based on symbolic affirmation of the existing social order. In this ethnographic instance one can vividly see how a critical reflection of ritual activities and their significances leads to a questioning of the hitherto prevailing social order and of the social inclusion and exclusion of various groups in Nepal.

The questions of how and why changes in rituals come about and what factors may induce change also continue in the following chapter by Christian Jahoda. The author's point of departure is the search for connections between ritual practices, social relationships and political power structures. Here again we encounter the fundamental question of whether the purpose of rituals is especially to affirm and reproduce the existing social structure. If yes, is it a local social structure that is affirmed? Jahoda goes on to discuss the connections between local structure and the higher political system. Like the preceding author, he reflects on a further significant factor in the relationship between communal ritual performances and social structure: time. Is there a temporal relationship between the social reality, which understandably we assume to be subject to processes of change, and the ritual practices, whose dynamic of change may proceed at a different pace? Additionally Jahoda considers the methodological opportunities offered by tracking the changes in rituals in a diachronic historical perspective. Admittedly, such an approach demands that one should be able to base oneself on pertinent data on the local festivities from relevant sources in other historical periods; the author succeeded in acquiring this data.

The ritual performances Jahoda examines are also, as in Pfaff-Czarnecka's ethnographic instance, bound up with a historically powerful religious tradition, Tibetan Buddhism. Taking Bloch's opinions (1989) as his point of departure, Jahoda conceives religious rituals as characterised by various types of formalised com-

munication and ritual as a special variety of the political process. Hence the author assumes that the contemporary and historic relationships between social groups and political power structures may be uncovered by researching ritual. For Jahoda, the object of interest was communal ritual performances in two localities in a region that may be called historical Western Tibet. The region is currently divided between two states, India and China. The author studied village festivals in localities on both sides of the present state border, i.e. in countries with differing political regimes.

Jahoda noted the growth of conflicts between the majority landowning population and a group of musicians belonging to the excluded "low caste" during the Sherken festival in a Tibetan-speaking village on the Indian side. In a second case he engaged in research into the Namtong festival in a village that is now part of the Tibet Autonomous Region in China. Here, by contrast, Jahoda discovered ongoing cooperation between the majority population and musicians (similarly of "low caste") during ritual in different political and ideological conditions. In both cases he examined communal ritual activities that are bound up with the idea of affirming a hierarchical model of social order. This order is further based on the concept of a higher natural-cosmological and religious one. According to the author's findings, ritual performance in the case of communities on the Indian side became an occasion for the onset of tensions and even open conflicts between the majority population and the socially disadvantaged minority. Conversely, in the second case, observed in a village on the Chinese side, ritual is more a means of demonstrating consensus and cohesion between groups. In both cases, from the standpoint of a longer historical process, the author has drawn attention to changes in ritual that took place under the influence of political power – control, supervision or protection of ritual practice. As Jahoda ascertained, however, the changes were not expressed in any large-scale renewal of ritual, or in notable adaptations or variations. Rather they led to a reduction of ritual in terms of the use of space and agency that is the conduct of various activities.

It is not only ritual performances that are exposed to possible conflict resulting from pressure from political power. An interesting field opens up with the research of ritual objects whose use or even whose very existence may depend on fundamental social changes. This may also be the case with sacral religious objects in a society that has undergone forced secularisation or atheisation. The suppression of religious structures of whatever kind, the persecution of religious representatives and believers and the renewal of religious life after fundamental political change has created a social framework which enabled or hindered manipulations with sacral objects and allowed or forbade the transmission of religious education and the knowledge of the correct use of religious objects.

As a rule, special material objects have an irreplaceable role in religious rituals. Together with ritual acts and ritual substances they guarantee that the ritual performance proceeds according to the presupposed scenario, in line with the canon, and therefore has legitimacy. In the manipulation of objects, importance attaches first of all to the acts performed with them, secondly to the spaces where those acts are performed and the places where the objects appear (Rappaport 1999: 144–145). Ritual sacral objects, like religious acts, therefore generally support the endurance and reproduction of religious systems, and accordingly may be expedient objects of attack if the ruling power or certain social groups or individuals are attempting to disturb religious order.

Maria-Katharina Lang has examined the significance of sacral artefacts in religious ceremonies in present-day Mongolia, following political changes at the beginning of the 1990s. Simultaneously she has retraced the fate of religious objects in periods of political persecution during the communist regime, approximately from the end of the 1930s, which saw the climax of the first wave of violent repression against religious representatives and believers, known as the Great Purge in Mongolia, down to the fall of the regime. Based on the rich collection of Buddhist ritual artefacts from northern Mongolia that the Austrian traveller Hans Leder acquired around 1900, she had sufficient empirical data on religious objects from a period when religious life in the country was not yet subject to the restrictions of subsequent period. Lang discovered what had happened to religious artefacts in various political periods, and also how material objects as special symbols and representations may evoke the past and construct an image of the past by various means. The author paid particular attention to how the manipulation of sacral objects (involving specific gestures or movements of the body in connection with further ritual activities such as prayer, etc.) contributed to the

transmission of the religious system even at a time when it was politically suppressed. However, merely handed-down religious rituals and knowledge did not suffice for a return to religious rituals and religious life from the 1990s. Renewal of the religious system was equally dependent on institutional support after fundamental political changes.

RITUAL AND COGNITIVE PROCESS

How is cognition about rituals created? How do the actors apply this knowledge in specific situations in a concrete cultural context? What does the study of ritual performance bring if we turn our attention to the cognitive processes in the perception of ritual and the formation of the contents of knowledge about rituals?

Andre Gingrich concentrates on the socio-ideological reproduction of cognition within the ritual and the transmission of the ritual process in time. As inner characteristics of the ritual process he sees on the one hand, in agreement with Bloch (1989), a potential creativity in ritual and hence also the possibility of its changing. On the other hand, however, there is also the performance and handing down of repetitive elements which lead to conservation of the ritual (or its individual parts) and do not support change. As regards cognition of the ritual in society, Gingrich considers the ritual act a threshold situation, linking everyday life with a domain of higher values and norms, a higher order. He agrees with Mary Douglas (1970) and Edmund Leach (1976) that threshold times and threshold zones are for the most part specific to ritual.

Gingrich uses the resources of the anthropology of ideologies in his research into the cognitive processes in which conceptions of ritual are formed. His main interest is in the inner features of complex ideologies as a background that exerts an influence on ritual, that is to say on the ritual's form and the manner of its performance. The author then asks what role ideology has in the production and reproduction of rituals, to what extent local and global ideologies can directly evoke or impose certain rituals, and to what extent ideologies may explain and legitimise rituals.

He explores this question based on the example of the conservation of ritual places in the mountains known in the south-western part of the Arabian peninsula as *Himah* or alternatively *Hawtah.* The ideologies that at present exert an influence towards the preservation of *Himah* and *Hawtah* are firstly various versions of Islam (local ideologies and global movements) and secondly the currently widespread environmental doctrines (global ideologies).

Himah and *Hawtah* originated and also currently exist above all for pragmatic reasons. As wooded mountain areas they retain water and protect the inhabitants and the land from floods and destruction. Nonetheless, *Himah* and *Hawtah* have assumed certain attributes that have passed over into (local) cultural practices and norms for their preservation. These protected places were not intended to be permanently settled. It was possible to use the mountain summits, where sometimes a small mosque was built or a water reservoir located, for the performance of important rituals such as the rain sacrifice, designated by the local term *istisqa'* or *istighatha.* In local versions of Islam *Himah* and *Hawtah* were considered not only as transitional and threshold ritual zones but also as a certain prefiguration of the paradise that exists in the other world. Since neither *Himah* nor *Hawtah* are explicitly mentioned in the Koran, the very concept of the zones has become an object of ideological religious dispute. These zones are respected in areas where the moderate local Islamic ideologies prevail. Against this the radical Islamic movements, now growing in strength, declare that the notion of such a zone is "pagan".

The protected *Himah* and *Hawtah* zones are currently found in several states on the Arabian peninsula. In Yemen, resulting from the bloody civil war during the first decade of the 21st century, many *Himah* were destroyed either as a direct result of the fighting or through its consequences: the population was forced to move to the protected places and use them. During the same period relative stability prevailed in Saudi Arabia. The state organs concentrated on the effective integration of the south-western provinces, where the *Himah* are found. Currently, with global efforts towards the conservation of the living environment, there have also been developments within Saudi Arabia resulting in the *Himah* natural areas being granted protection by state organs. Similarly, steps to protect the *Hawtah* are being taken in Lebanon and Syria.

Gingrich's research into the *Himah* and *Hawtah* zones by means of ideologies has shown how local versions of moderate Islam can link protected natural localities with ritual practices and social norms. Local ideologies may thus be successfully combined with global environmental doctrines and lead to state protection for the region. On the other hand Gingrich has recorded the influence of militant versions of Islam that are becoming global ideologies. By rejecting the *Himah* and *Hawtah*, the global Islamic ideologies, in conjunction with an uncontrolled radical version of commercial capitalism, may cause the complete disappearance and destruction of this prefiguration of "paradise on earth".

Tatiana Bužeková has approached the research of ritual performance through its conception and on the basis of relationship to its social background. She has sought connections between interpretations of ritual by its actors and the participation of actors in certain ritual groups. Bužeková studies the neo-shamanic groups that practise shamanic healing rituals, which may, however, be based on differing ritual actions and ritual conceptions. An entire scale of varied consensual relationships and tensions is thereby created, both between the participants in ritual groups and between particular groups and others. The author stresses the fact, also addressed by Pascal Boyer (1990), that the "common" anthropological conception of traditional practice as an activity based on shared conceptions is not necessarily quite so evident and conclusive. Hence when studying ritual performance Bužeková differentiated a number of analytical approaches. Taking Dan Sperber's opinions (1996, 1997) as her point of departure, she examined ritual as a social phenomenon, which in order to be elucidated must be traced as a diffused cultural representation in the society/group. On the one hand, therefore, she followed the participants' actions in the ritual and designated them as a series of public representations. On the other hand, she focused equally on explicit verbal public representations related to ritual conceptions and which had a relation to a further series of mental representations. The author afterwards constructed her analysis of ritual upon the two above series of public representations: actions and explicit verbal expressions about underlying ritual concepts.

The neo-shamanic groups that appeared in Slovakia following fundamental political changes in the 1990s are part of the wider global New Age movement. So far as the current discourse in alternative spiritual movements is concerned, neo-shamanism is considered not so much a religion as a set of special healing techniques, and the group leader plays an important role in the practice of these. The movement currently has an eclectic character, and it would be capable of adopting ritual and magical practices from various cultural traditions. As Tatiana Bužeková has shown, however, the adoption and use of rituals is neither unlimited nor a matter of chance, and the choice, use and interpretations of rituals are influenced as a rule by the social conditions of their cultural transmission. Taking the examples of two relatively stable neo-shamanic groups in Bratislava, the author has described group differences both in actions (= how the rituals were performed) and in ritual concepts (= how participants explained the rituals). The research conclusions showed how differences depend on the social dynamic of the group and the authority and charisma of the group leader.

Eva-Maria Knoll has opened up a new and little-investigated field of research with her chapter on medical tourism, which she defines in agreement with Milica and Karla Bookman (2007) as travel for the purpose of improvement of health. The author argues that medical tourism may be studied as a fusion of the ritual of healing and the ritual of travel. Tensions or conflicts may easily arise in this combination, however. Both rituals have different actors (tourist – patient) and different goals (healing – relaxation) and they are associated with different modes of ritual behaviour. Knoll understands ritual as a group of particular normative and ceremonial structures and symbolic actions, which the actors combine with "higher goals". She considers both the ritual of healing and the ritual of travel as rites of passage, distinguished by ritual phases that the patient and tourist undergo: separation, transformation and reincorporation. At the same time, Knoll understands ritual as a process enabling the participants in ritual performance to come to terms with unexpected situations, offering guidelines to resolve the situation or create order.

This combination of the two distinct and (for western Euro-American societies) well-established rituals of healing and travel into a single ritual is not new or unfamiliar. Pilgrimage in search of health has a long tradition in human history. Knoll suggests that the combination of both rituals on the theoretical plane could link up two existing concepts of "the medical gaze" (Foucault 2005) and "the tourist gaze" (Urry 2002). The author defines the new, combined concept of "the medico-tourist gaze" as the pursuit of extraordinary healing

in an extraordinary environment. Knoll argues that in such a case the ritual transitions are, as it were, doubled. The patient and tourist in one person faces illness, healing, the unknown environment of the clinic and at the same time of an unknown country, the cultural milieu in which their healing is to take place. This period of their life is thereby boosted into a threshold ritual situation. The actors in medical tourism find themselves in a period of "liminality" and "anti-structure" (Turner 1969), outside everyday life and the usual order. Knoll suggests that with the combination of two of the most significant rituals of the modern age – the ritual of healing and ritual of travel – a new ritual form is emerging based on the concept of the medico-tourist gaze.

RITUAL AND THE REPRODUCTION OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Ritual performance makes it possible to transmit information on various aspects of the social structure and social norms, or even to create and regulate them. Ritual in this sense may affirm the existence of social groups, but at the same time it may evoke social differences and social boundaries, which determine who belongs to the group and who does not. Research is therefore concerned not only with tracing the economic and political interests of the various groups, who may also have differing hierarchical status, but equally with the aspect of political power. One may ask to what extent the ritual process can become a political activity or even an "exercise of politics" (Rao 2006: 150–151), and how such a process may stimulate conflict situations or, on the contrary, may lead to consensus.

Helmut Lukas follows this line of argument when he states that rituals on the one hand become a means of bringing about consensus in society, insofar as they reproduce an image of social order and social norms that is acceptable to the various groups. Taking his premises from Turner (1969), he goes on to argue that conflicts in society result from the differing values and differing interests of social groups. The significance of ritual therefore resides in its integrative capacity, through which it can encompass a variety of social groups with varying values and interests. Through the unifying medium of a higher order, a common value which is acceptable to diverse groups may come into being. He also accepts the view of Max Gluckman (1963) that the symbolic performance of conflicts in ritual becomes a catharsis and reinforces social cohesion.

The author applies these methodological premises to the case of the regal rituals in Laos, which were performed in the period of the Lao monarchy (until 1975). They were intended to unify the Lao, the politically dominant ethnic group from the lowland region, and the Kmhmu, a subordinated group of the original inhabitants living in the mountains. Lukas wanted to test the opinion of Keyes (1995) that the regal rituals reflected unequal and strained relationships between the two groups. He therefore asked whether the rituals had succeeded in forging contact between the groups and thus contributed to reducing intergroup tensions. To verify the research questions he used descriptions of the rituals from the 19th and 20th centuries.

The regal rituals in northern Laos, e.g. for the New Year, assumed the participation of the Kmhmu and other Mon-Khmer-speaking groups (who were the original inhabitants). Lukas drew attention to the fact that although ritual reproduced the social order and expressed the subordinate position of these peoples (lumped together under the derogatory appellation Khà), at the same time the king turned towards them during the performance, showing them respect as "elder brothers" who performed an important part of the New Year rituals and were irreplaceable in their function. In the New Year rituals in south-western Laos in the capital Champasak, the Khà peoples even became the "lords" of the country for the few days of rituals and were not required to respect some of the intergroup rules.

In conclusion Lukas shows that the extant descriptions of rituals affirmed the dominant position of the Lao population and the subordinate position of the Khà peoples, and simultaneously on the ideological level defined a place for both groups in the social structure. However, anthropologists have sufficient ethnographic data at their disposal, even from the pre-colonial period of the Lao monarchy, to clarify the differences between the ideological definition of social relationships in society and the real intergroup relationships in everyday life. Hence the regal rituals were above all a means the political elites employed to the preserve the

status quo in society. The limits of rituals as means of social consensus were shown when social groups opposed to the hitherto-prevailing conditions of social integration appeared.

Gebhard Fartacek has addressed the issue of rituals attached to holy places to which various ethnic (or ethno-religious) groups make pilgrimages. In fieldwork in Syria he documented the repeated statements by pilgrims and administrators of the holy places saying that these places were shared by diverse groups and therefore became spaces for inter-group contacts, which do not often take place in everyday life. However, as the author learned by observation, the majority of pilgrim sites may be identified as being attached to specific ethno-religious groups: Sunnites, Christians, Druzes or Alawites. There are few holy places that could be said to belong to differing groups. The question arises of whether pilgrim places and the rituals linked with them become symbols that create boundaries between groups, or whether on the contrary they serve as "fracture zones" between different groups.

The author learned that the determination of holy places from the emic perspective is based in principle on a number of fundamental features: peculiar topographic manifestations, local origin legends and a holy man who is associated with the place. As structural elements these features are, in principle, common to all groups. Likewise from the emic perspective, pilgrims of various denominations visit holy places essentially for two reasons: to acquire *baraka*, the power of God's blessing, and to make a vow or to fulfil a vow at a holy place. As Fartacek observed, the ritual practices with the help of which pilgrims acquire *baraka* (e.g. physical contact with a holy man's grave, among other things), are scarcely distinguishable between individual groups. Certain differences may be observed in the practices linked to the utterance or fulfilment of a promise.

The proclamation *kullnā miṯl baʿḍ* [We're all (of) equal (value)] was repeatedly noted by Fartacek at the holy places, and it may be explained (among other things) by a conceptual notion according to which pilgrim places are shaped in local tradition. Fartacek discovered that the proclamation actually has a dual significance. On the one hand, it corresponds with Turner's concept of *communitas* and his understanding of pilgrimage as anti-structure (Turner 1969). This means that the pilgrims form a gathering of equal individuals who shed their accustomed roles and the status they have in everyday life during their pilgrimage. At the pilgrim places one may observe active interpersonal contacts and the expression of equality in interpersonal actions, with an emergence of existential and spontaneous *communitas* according to Turner's terminology. However, such personal relationships can be observed only among the pilgrims of one ethno-religious group. On the other hand, the proclamation *kullnā miṯl baʿḍ* can be elucidated also by Turner's concept of ideological *communitas*, i.e. by ideas of utopian/ideal models in society. In this specific case there is an ideological notion about the holy places. According to the local culture, holy places are precisely the places that are bound up with intergroup communication. In the final analysis Fartacek confirms that the notion of holy places in Syria, and also of ritual performances at these places, supports the reproduction of the social structure, the concretely existing and accepted ethno-religious boundaries between Sunnites, Christians, Druzes and Alawites. At the same time, these places are linked with the ideological notion that the essence of holy places is that they are designed for all groups, and so these groups "need one another".

CONCLUSION

Although the authors in this book have approached their cases from a variety of theoretical standpoints and methodological approaches, all of them have posed one question: how does ritual become a possible source of conflict or consensus in society, and also how may it be instrumental in avoiding conflict and bringing about consensus? The search for answers to this question produced a second unifying line in the publication: this was the necessity of tracing ritual against the background of social relationships and local or global economic, political, ideological and cultural processes. As the research findings show, contemporary societies in Asia and Europe on their way to multiplied modernity face many crises in which economic interests, political goals, ideological concepts and the values of various social groups or individuals come into potential or open conflict. Ritual meanwhile continues to function in both directions: on the one hand as a reflection or trigger

of conflict, on the other hand as a pressure towards the limitation of conflict, tending towards social cohesion.

Certainly it is no coincidence that most of the authors have concerned themselves with the performance of religious rituals. They offer persuasive research findings to support the argument that religious rituals may become particularly sensitive to the projection of the conflicting interests and goals of differing social groups. As social actions bound up with the idea of divine personality and "higher" order, they demand "respect", and their performance is shaped not only by the religious canon but also frequently by the social consensus. Insofar as the ritual actors or a section of them strive towards changes during ritual performance, such attempts are often linked with their weighty social, political or ideological interests.

One such instance is the Hindu ritual complex *Dasain* (or *Durga Puja*), which Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka has researched in contemporary Nepal. The author convincingly describes how the differing opinions of the actors regarding the significance of the ritual, which culminated in changes in the performance of *Dasain*, is closely connected with changes in political communication in Nepalese society, which is distinguished by large cultural, ethnic and religious differentiation. The *Dasain* ritual thus becomes an arena in which political conflict between the various ethnic and religious groups in the country is played out. Christian Jahoda also presents research data on the influence of political power on changes in ritual, focusing on village festivals in Western Tibet and Tibetan-speaking areas in Upper Kinnaur. The rituals in question are based on the confirmation of a hierarchical model of the social system, conceived as a higher religious and cosmological order. Ethnographic research shows that the varying ways in which the participants understand the connection of a ritual to a certain religious system or to the social order may in the course of time result, under particular political conditions (e.g. in the region of historical Western Tibet, today divided between India and China), in serious discrepancies. The findings of Pfaff-Czarnecká and Jahoda may further be compared with the results of research by Maria-Katharina Lang on the influence of important political changes in Mongolia on religious objects. Lang documents various strategies by ritual actors on the microsocial, local level during the period of the communist regime, which were directed towards preserving religious objects in defiance of official state doctrine. On that account believers came into conflict with the state power, but the retained objects were important afterwards in the revitalisation of religious rituals after the change of political regime in the 1990s.

Andre Gingrich's paper also addresses the influence of ideology on the local level and on global levels. Gingrich studies the preservation or, conversely, the suppression of the protected natural zones and ritual spaces known as *Himah* (or *Hawtah*) in the south-western region of the Arabian peninsula, currently divided into three states – Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon. He shows how the relationship to the ritual places changes depending on political relations in the various states, and especially under the influence of local and global ideologies, which may turn the *Himah* into zones of conflict and tension. Similarly, Tatiana Bužeková, drawing on her research of a new phenomenon, neo-shamanism in an urban environment in Slovakia, finds that differences of ideas in the perception of spiritual and ritual tradition not infrequently lead to modifications or transformations of rituals, because differing groups tend to try to perform the rituals differently. In the final result the altered rituals may become a group differentiating element, contributing to the formation of social boundaries between groups which is shown also in the research findings of Pfaff-Czarnecká, Jahoda and Gingrich. Shifts in the conception of ritual and differing expectations of the actors may culminate even in the appearance of a new ritual, as discussed by Eva-Maria Knoll in the case of "medical tourism". This relatively new phenomenon in complex modern societies responds to the changed needs and ideas of patients about medical services.

The book, however, also features examination of other rituals that have had the capacity to link various groups and various actors' interests. On the one hand, the performance of ritual has directly become a procedure for the bridging of potential antagonisms in hierarchically or socially differentiated societies. Such an idea lay behind, for example, the practice of regal rituals in Laos, studied by Helmut Lukas, who concentrates on their integrative capacity. If rituals are conceived as common values, which are shared by a number of social groups, it follows that they have the potential to repress inter-group tensions and conflicts. Similarly, Gebhard Fartacek in his research of rituals of pilgrimage in Syria shows how, on the other hand, ritual

ideological concepts have appealed to common interests, raised above the particular interests of the various groups, and the actors have conducted ritual performances as affirmations of (an ideal) social order. At the same time, however, both authors provide ethnographic data which reveal disagreements between groups and the formation of social boundaries, or show the limits of inter-group contacts.

The book's eight chapters present new empirical data and theoretical findings on the continuing significance of ritual for its performers and participants, for certain social groups, or for an entire society. Through their findings the authors aim to contribute to the current discourse on ritual performances, whose power and effectiveness lend them an enduring fascination for the research community.

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